

IN DEFENSE OF PLAY: A REASSESSMENT OF
TOM STOPPARD'S THEATERS

By

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for my husband, Matthew Furbush, who made this,
and so many other dreams, come true

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Tom Stoppard's first major play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, ignited a divisive critical controversy that has persisted until the present. Though the play enjoyed long initial runs and continues to be performed and anthologized, it has faced bitter charges of theatrical "parasitism" and political irrelevance. Only recently have critics begun to develop an effective rebuttal to these charges, but even as the hostile critical consensus began to be replaced by more perceptive readings of Stoppard's early, playful derivativeness, the author, apparently in response to the attacks on his overt borrowing and perceived irrelevance, started to write serious, "original," plays directly addressing social and political issues.

I defend the early, playful works, especially Rosencrantz, arguing that their overt derivativeness and resistance to closure constitute a structural challenge to a highly conservative model of authorship, a challenge

complemented by the content of the plays. After investigating the theological and exclusively masculine roots of the traditional concept of the author, I argue that inasmuch as this model works to preserve both patriarchal authority and a theocentric world view, Stoppard's efforts to topple it--by defying "originality" and refusing to present authorial Truth--can only be read as politically progressive.

The bulk of this study, however, is devoted to close readings of Rosencrantz, Travesties, and The Real Thing. I contend that the open-ended and boldly derivative Rosencrantz is not only Stoppard's most theatrically effective play, but his most profoundly political achievement as well. I read Travesties as a transitional play, for while its first half explicitly challenges "originality" in authorship, the second half takes a regrettable turn toward Truth, sacrificing both the play's critique of authorial authority and its theatrical effectiveness. Although Stoppard attempts in The Real Thing to revive the play of styles which graced Rosencrantz, I find that the "realistic" controlling frame reduces the potentially dislocating impact of these games, so that the play unfortunately remains closer to the style of Stoppard's later, socially "committed" plays than to the delightfully derivative, playfully uncertain style of Rosencrantz.

INTRODUCTION

When the curtain rises on Tom Stoppard's Travesties, James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, and Lenin are seated in a Zurich library during World War I, writing. Tzara works in the best Dadaist fashion by cutting paper, word by word, into a hat and reading the nonsense results. But Tzara's nonsense poem, beginning "Eel ate enormous appletzara"¹ happens to make sense as awkward French, "Il est un homme, s'appelle Tzara,"² more sense, it seems, than the phrases Joyce dictates to his aide, Gwendolen, from the scraps of paper he pulls not from a hat, but from his pockets: "Morose delectation . . . Aquinas tunbelly . . . Frate porcospino" (p. 19). Meanwhile, Lenin is searching for material to use in his work on imperialism in the books brought to him by Cecily, the librarian, when his wife, Nadya, enters to announce a "revolutsia" (p. 19) in St. Petersburg. Upon Nadya's reassurances that the news is true--"Da, da, da!" (p. 20), she affirms in Russian, sounding, of course, like Tzara "explaining" Dadaism--Lenin hurriedly gathers his papers so that he may rush to attend to the revolution, dropping one of them in the process. After Joyce picks up Lenin's dropped paper and reads it

aloud, the scene is taken over by Henry Carr, a British consular officer, who begins orally "writing" his memoirs of Zurich during the First World War. But in Carr's faulty memory, which controls the play, his recollections of sharing Zurich in the late 1910s with Joyce, Tzara, and Lenin are dominated by his obsession with his own "personal triumph in the demanding role of Ernest, not Ernest, the other one" (p. 21), in fact, Algernon of The Importance of Being Earnest, the play performed by members of the English speaking community in Zurich under the management of James Joyce.

Political revolution, artistic revolution, art assembled from scraps of paper--even before this brief opening scene is over, Travesties has introduced many of the issues which have become central to Stoppard criticism. What is the proper relationship between art and politics? Can writing produced by pulling scraps of paper from a hat properly be called art? Or is such derivative writing inferior to "original" art which stems solely from the creative genius of the artist? Is there a connection between pulling art out of a hat and fostering political revolution? In Travesties, only Tzara sees such a connection, for Dadaists contend that political revolution requires a smashing of the great traditions of art, performed by cutting master-pieces into scraps. Joyce finds art politically neutral, yet he produces his writing by pulling scraps of paper from his pockets, assembling the already written Odyssey and the

Dublin Street Directory for 1904 into Ulysses, just as Tzara produces his writing by pulling scraps of paper from his hat, reassembling the already written Shakespearean sonnets into his nonsense poems, which, in Stoppard's hands, sometimes turn out to make sense after all. Not only does art come out of a hat, Travesties indicates, but so does all writing, for Lenin makes his book on imperialism by gathering existing writing on economics and placing it in a new context. And no doubt Carr's attempts to write a history of Zurich during World War I illustrate Tzara's contention that "history comes out of a hat too" (p. 83).

If Travesties does not provide the final word on the relationship between art and politics, it does point unequivocally to the inevitable derivativeness of all writing. Not only does Stoppard make this point repeatedly and emphatically within the play--scissors, hats, and pockets form a recurring motif, and characters discuss copyrights and the relative merits of pockets and hats as sources of art--but Stoppard's own construction of Travesties also underscores the point yet again: Travesties itself comes out of a hat, for the play is a collage of The Importance of Being Earnest, excerpts from Lenin's Collected Writings, snippets from Ellmann's biography of Joyce, bits from Eliot and Shakespeare, segments of songs, and numerous other sources. What is true of Travesties is true of other major Stoppard plays as well. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are

Dead likewise comes out of a hat, a hat containing most notably Hamlet, and, unmistakably, Waiting for Godot. And like Travesties, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead explores the concept of authorship within the play as well. Even The Real Thing, one of Stoppard's most "realistic" plays, incorporates Strindberg's Miss Julie and Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore' into the play's larger exploration of authorship and the validity of "political" art.

All writing may be derivative, but few writers call more attention to the derivativeness of their writing than Stoppard, for he does not just quietly borrow as so many writers before him did: Stoppard flaunts his borrowing, making it a central issue in his plays, borrowing even title characters from Hamlet, easily the most well-known play in English. In choosing such a strategy, Stoppard challenges the traditional model of the God-like Author who creates his original masterpiece out of nothing, for the model cannot peacefully coexist with such foregrounding of the derivativeness of art. Furthermore, the model of authorship Stoppard challenges is, as we shall see, inherently conservative, for it is both an exclusively masculine model, tightly linked to male procreation, and an essentially theological model, inasmuch as the mythic account of God creating the universe out of nothing heavily shapes and structures it.

Given his intense focus on derivativeness as a central fact of writing, and given the conservative political affiliations of the model of authorship challenged by this focus on derivativeness, the critical response to Stoppard seems particularly ironic. Critics attack Stoppard precisely for his derivativeness, condemning him as a "parasite" who borrows from other, more "original" writers to make his derivative, hence inferior, plays. Then, apparently overlooking the political implications of his challenge to the traditional model of authorship, they complain that his plays are apolitical or politically conservative and should, therefore, be devalued. These complaints, remarkable in themselves, are even more remarkable for their unusual vehemence and characteristic tone of moral indignation, for we are accustomed to thinking, albeit wrongly, of critical judgments, and the critical tools employed in making such judgments, as morally and politically neutral, and thus unlikely to incite passion.

The tone of the debate surrounding Stoppard's worth as a playwright has been so passionate, in fact, that David Bratt resorted to battlefield imagery in his excellent scholarly review of Stoppard criticism, depicting supporters and detractors as members of two warring camps trading heated blows. Centering his overview on the issue of derivativeness, Bratt explained that the anti-Stoppard camp rallies around the "charge that Stoppard lacks a voice of his own"³

and is therefore reduced to "borrowing more or less irresponsibly from his betters."⁴ Robert Brustein set the tone for the debate in 1967 when he derided Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead as a "theatrical parasite, feeding off Hamlet, Waiting for Godot, and Six Characters in Search of an Author."⁵ He condemned the play as "derivative"⁶ and asserted, "Stoppard does not fight hard enough for his insights--they all seem to come to him, prefabricated, from other plays."⁷ Lurking behind Brustein's complaint is the Romantic notion that an author must suffer miserably, "fall upon the thorns of life,"⁸ so to speak, if his writing is to enjoy any authority. Christopher Nichols responded to Rosencrantz with a subdued version of Brustein's complaint, stating that "despite the ballyhoo, I found no deep search, no stinging innovation"⁹ in the play. Art must not only be a deep search, he apparently assumed, but it must also sting if we are to embrace it as authentic.

The most outraged response to Stoppard's borrowing in Rosencrantz was to come in 1970 when C.O. Gardner, writing in response to R.H. Lee's critical analysis of the play, "The Circle and Its Tangent,"¹⁰ argued that Lee's article was misguided because "it takes seriously, not to say solemnly, a play which does not merit serious critical attention."¹¹ "The thing is in fact a swill," he asserted, "composed of second-hand Beckett, third-hand Kafka, and the goon show,"¹² so the only proper critical response is to

ignore this "thing" completely in the hope that it will disappear. Again, of course, we see a Romantic vision of authorship structuring the condemnation. Rosencrantz is a cheat, "a swill," because Stoppard filters the play through layers of art rather than going straight to life for material to produce an unmediated vision based on authentic experience.

The legacy of Brustein's famous charge against Rosencrantz has continued to haunt Stoppard criticism in general, and we find critics filing the same complaint of derivative-ness against later Stoppard plays. John Simon, for example, summed up Stoppard's stage plays to date by depicting them as parasites: "What they all [Enter a Free Man, Rosencrantz, Jumpers, After Magritte, The Real Inspector Hound, and Travesties] have in common to some degree is what I have at various times described with images culled from the animal and insect worlds, where the eggs or larvae of one species may be unconsciously hatched by the efforts, or fed by the very organisms, of another species."¹³ Simon went on to describe "this parasitic quality"¹⁴ of Stoppard's work with an elaborate parasite/host-organism metaphor that continued for the duration of the article.

Taking a slightly different tack, Philip Roberts condemned Stoppard for lack of seriousness in an article entitled "Tom Stoppard: Serious Artist or Siren?" He criticized The Real Inspector Hound and After Magritte,

saying, "In both, what appears central is the opportunity for wit, parody, and metaphysical dalliance to do with the nature of perception."¹⁵ And then, managing a sidelong reference to the disease imagery which forms a motif in Stoppard criticism, he charged, "The plays reel away from seriousness as from a contagious disease."¹⁶ Though the terms of the attack differ, the assumptions underlying Roberts's condemnation are drawn from the same Romantic notion of authorship that informed earlier complaints; that is, "serious" art, art worthy of our deepest consideration, stems not from wit and intellectual games, but from a somber, preferably painful engagement with the stuff of life.

Robert Brustein's "A Theater for Clever Journalists" picked up the disease motif referred to by Roberts and used so extensively by Simon. Reviewing Night and Day, Brustein said the following of Stoppard: "He has insinuated himself into the affections of smart people like a heartworm, usurping whatever place might once have been reserved there for genuine artists"¹⁷ (italics mine). Returning again to the issue of seriousness that recurs in Stoppard criticism, Brustein asked, "Can anyone really take Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seriously after seeing the plays on which it was based, Six Characters in Search of an Author and Waiting for Godot?"¹⁸ (italics mine). Brustein tried to dismiss Stoppard with the following pronouncement: "As a

dramatist, Stoppard is a dandy."¹⁹ The intended insult likely stems from the idea that a dandy is concerned only with appearances and surfaces while a "genuine artist" (to use Brustein's term) shares his experiences of real life in all their emotional richness.

Joan Juliet Buck's article on Stoppard's The Real Thing revealed the same set of underlying assumptions about the role of a genuine artist. Her combination interview-play review featured in bold print, "The theater's foremost gamesman takes on 'The Real Thing,'"²⁰ a statement which implies that the game-playing and derivativeness that characterize Stoppard's early work are not as authentic as the love relationships portrayed in The Real Thing. As Buck told it, she spent her two-hour interview with Stoppard trying to get him to discuss how his personal experiences found their way into his latest play. Stoppard tried repeatedly to redirect the questioning before saying, "There's something wrong with the question . . . there must be some false premise in it, and it's probably to do with your underestimating the mechanical level of writing a play."²¹

Stoppard closed the interview by reiterating his doubts about the validity of the prevailing view of the author, a view which sees the author creating art not from other art, but from gut-wrenching life experiences:

The main trouble with the premise is that none of these thoughts is a consideration while writing a play. It's all kind of fake, and the interview makes you fake by allowing retrospective ideas to

masquerade as some form of intention. One of the problems is that writers don't think about their work in that external way.²²

While Stoppard makes every effort, both in interviews and through his plays, to emphasize the derivative nature of writing, critics and interviewers somehow overlook or misread this challenge to the traditional model of authorship and condemn Stoppard for not conforming to the very model of original creation his work seeks to dismantle. Such a misreading is far from unprecedented, though, for we recall that Beckett's Waiting for Godot met with early hostility as critics complained that the play did not have much of a plot. But just as the lack of traditionally defined plot is vital to Godot's point about the disintegration of linear movement in a world without a Creator, so Stoppard's lack of traditionally defined originality is vital to his challenge to the traditional concept of the author as the creating God of his work. Far from being the overriding weakness in his work, Stoppard's open derivativeness may be his most important contribution to the canon.

By recognizing Stoppard's celebration of borrowing as a challenge to the traditional concept of authorship, we put ourselves in a strong position for rebutting the second major complaint against Stoppard, the complaint that his plays are apolitical or politically conservative and thus not as worthy as other, more "politically relevant" plays. In filing this complaint, critics overlook the political

implications of his challenge to a conservative critical model and focus their attention on Stoppard's outspoken denunciation of Marx ("he got it wrong"²³) and Lenin ("in the ten years after 1917 fifty times more people were done to death than in the fifty years before 1917"²⁴), and on the absence of any endorsement of Marxist or socialist principles in his plays. Because so many critics currently rely on a rather simplistic equation of Marxism and political progressivism, the perception "that Stoppard is a political reactionary"²⁵ has become one of "two fairly often voiced anxieties"²⁶ about Stoppard's reputation.

Kenneth Tynan's New Yorker Profile, for example, centers around a vague disapproval of what Tynan perceives as Stoppard's conservative politics. Noting that "Stoppard is a passionate fan"²⁷ of cricket, Tynan generalizes "Cricket attracts artists who are either conservative or nonpolitical."²⁸ Tynan also divides British dramatists since the 1960s into two groups, the "heated, embattled, socially committed playwrights, like John Osborne, John Arden, and Arnold Wesker"²⁹ and the "cool, apolitical stylists"³⁰ like Stoppard. Echoing Tynan's evaluation of Stoppard's politics, though not his disapproval, Joan Fitzpatrick Dean, author of Tom Stoppard: Comedy as a Moral Matrix, says, "Stoppard's plays tend toward the right."³¹ In his 1982 Tom Stoppard's Plays, Jim Hunter attempts to dismiss summarily this perception of Stoppard's

politics by pointing out that "the intellectual orthodoxy of live theatre--in sharp contrast, usually, to the box office orthodoxy--tends in any age to be radical, and in Western capitalist countries to be socialist."³² Stoppard, he continues, voices moderate political opinions and so should not be labeled reactionary. While Hunter's conclusion that Stoppard is no reactionary is undoubtedly correct, his contrast between the box office and intellectual orthodoxies of live theater seems, in effect, to concede that Stoppard's plays are essentially conservative. In making this concession, Hunter basically accepts the superficial and misleading conception of "political art" put forward by detractors.

The same flaw mars the reasoning of critics who argue that Stoppard's work has gotten progressively better as he has turned from the open derivativeness and game playing of early plays to more serious concerns like "politics," for these critics also overlook the political implications of his challenge to originality in authorship and simply assume that art overtly endorsing political goals is inherently valuable and should be embraced. Tynan, for example, notes approvingly in his Profile that "There are signs . . . that history has lately been forcing Stoppard into the arena of commitment."³³ In Beyond Absurdity: The Plays of Tom Stoppard, Victor L. Cahn also nods his approval of the shift in the content on Stoppard's plays as his

career has continued. Cahn traces a transition from resignation to involvement on the part of the characters who populate Stoppard's plays. He says, for example, "Stoppard's growing concern with political matters reaches new intensity in Every Good Boy Deserves Favor,"³⁴ a 1978 play set in a cell in a Soviet mental hospital for political dissidents. Cahn concludes his book by praising the "dignity"³⁵ of later Stoppard plays which show characters "struggling, not surrendering,"³⁶ characters who "seek faith in rationality . . . faith in human emotions . . . faith in relationships with other people . . . faith in their humanity."³⁷ Undoubtedly, then, Cahn shares the assumption that a direct treatment of political topics makes for a better play.

As recently as 1983, critics were still avidly praising Stoppard for his enlarged commitment to social issues. Carol Billman concludes her useful article on the manipulation of history in Travesties by noting approvingly that many of Stoppard's more recent plays, such as Professional Foul, Every Good Boy Deserves Favor, and Night and Day, "truly represent social engagements on Stoppard's part: these plays face squarely such issues as governmental restriction of individual freedom."³⁸ Bobbie Rothstein devotes her entire article to praising "The Reappearance of Public Man" in Professional Foul. She observes that "Stoppard's current work implies that a retreat by the self

from the public world is untenable--a stance diametrically opposed not only to absurdism, the most important current in postmodern writing, but also to his own earlier work."³⁹ She applauds Professional Foul because its characters take a stand and condemns Jumpers because its characters ignore pressing philosophical and political issues within the play. She says the "New Stoppard"⁴⁰ has "shifted gears from the playful play of words to more serious intellectual drama,"⁴¹ again using the term "serious" to indicate approval. To shift gears, Rothstein explains, Stoppard has had to reach "somewhat backwards in dramatic history for characters who are publicly committed to action in the political sphere."⁴²

I would never want to argue that the shift these critics perceive has not in fact occurred. Like those who argued that Stoppard's early plays are derivative, and like those who said Beckett's plays lack plot, these critics are right--many of Stoppard's later plays have indeed adopted more overtly political themes. Rothstein is also correct in pointing out that Stoppard has, paradoxically, had to reach somewhat backwards in dramatic history to make his ostensibly progressive change, for characters who struggle against the odds and end up making the world a better place to live are most at home in a teleological world that unfolds linearly, with man at the helm, always ultimately realizing his preordained destiny in the great scheme of things. My question at this point, though, is whether this

great leap backwards to overt political content in the form of socially committed characters does, in fact, constitute an improvement in Stoppard's playwriting, and whether, in the end, such political content even makes a play more politically valuable or effective.

Stoppard expressed similar reservations about the value of writing plays on politics in a 1974 Theatre Quarterly interview--before he started producing the plays critics praise as politically important. The interviewer broached the topic by saying, "You clearly don't feel yourself part of a 'movement' either, and your plays could hardly be called social or political."⁴³ Then, he posed the following, fairly typical question to Stoppard: "Does this mean you have no strong political feelings, or simply that they're not what you want to write plays about?"⁴⁴ Stoppard's response--"Look, can we clear a few decks to avoid confusion?"⁴⁵--likely revealed his irritation at being misunderstood and unjustly maligned yet again. He continued by listing ten recent plays that he "assume[d] all [went] into [the] political bag,"⁴⁶ before offering his instructive explanation of the relationship between plays and politics. "There are political plays which are about specific situations, and there are political plays which are about a general political situation, and there are plays which are political acts in themselves, insofar as it can be said that attacking or insulting an audience is a political

act."⁴⁷ But Stoppard challenged the idea that simply using political content, such as setting a play in South Africa, makes a play political: "There are even plays about politics which are about as political as Charley's Aunt."⁴⁸

Stoppard is not alone in questioning the value of overt political content in art, but it is highly ironic, given the context of his remarks, that his critical comrades, so to speak, include many Marxist literary critics. In Marxism and Literary Criticism, for example, Terry Eagleton issues a strikingly similar warning against "the 'vulgar Marxist' mistake of raiding literary works for their ideological content,"⁴⁹ for "the true bearers of ideology in art are the very forms, rather than the abstractable content, of the work itself."⁵⁰ With Stoppard's work, there is fortunately no need to insist upon a rigid (and ultimately untenable) separation of form and content, for the content of his plays reinforces the point made by the method of construction he chooses: both undermine the traditional concept of the author. If we can move beyond the prevailing, simplistic definition of political art (i.e., art explicitly endorsing specific political causes equals politically progressive, hence valuable art), we can begin developing the kind of analysis needed to correct some of these remarkable oversights in Stoppard criticism. This analysis requires a careful investigation of the model of originality in authorship, for we cannot begin to grasp the

import of Stoppard's challenge to this misleading and highly conservative critical tool without a thorough understanding of what interests are represented by the model, what values are reinforced by the model--in short, what is at stake here. In the course of this investigation, we also gain a clearer understanding of the critical response to Stoppard--particularly of the remarkable vehemence and tone of moral indignation which characterize this response--for we begin to see that the traditional concept of originality in authorship does indeed involve morals in a profound way. As a first step, let us turn to an early, but still highly influential model of creation to discover the roots of the traditional view of the Author.

The groundwork of the traditional concept of the author and the valorization of originality in artistic creation is laid in Genesis, the first book of the First Book, the book that describes the original act of creation. The first words of the Holy Book read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."⁵¹ The sole male deity of the Judeo-Christian tradition created light, dark, Heaven, Earth, land, oceans, plants, animals, the sun, the moon, the stars, and man himself. He created all this by His word: "And God said."⁵² The New Oxford Annotated Bible notes that "Creation by the word of God expresses God's absolute lordship and prepares for the doctrine of creation out of nothing."⁵³ The story of the creation links God with

the Word or "logos" (the original Greek word meaning, according to the OED, not only "word," but also "speech," "reason," "discourse," and often used to designate Jesus Christ, the Son of God⁵⁴). It also provides artists with a model of creation, reminding them that the original way to create is ex nihilo.

Here, then, is our culture's sacred model of the act of creation. Predictably, this model pervades and structures traditional critical thinking about the role of authors, positing the author as the sole origin of his work as God is the sole origin of the world. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain in their discussion of the concept of authorship in The Madwoman in the Attic, "the patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization."⁵⁵ This "metaphor of literary paternity" that Gilbert and Gubar describe is shaped by the biblical account of the creation and points to the intricate links between God, the Author, and the Father in much received critical thinking. Beginning more than a thousand years after the Genesis account, Gilbert and Gubar trace the metaphor of literary paternity in the West from the classical Greek period until the present and find that "the mimetic aesthetic that begins with Aristotle and descends through Sidney, Shakespeare, and Johnson implies that the poet, like a lesser God, has made or

engendered an alternative mirror-universe."⁵⁶ They point to "the network of connections among sexual, literary, and theological metaphors"⁵⁷ in medieval philosophy that continues to influence thought even in the twentieth century and conclude that "in patriarchal Western culture, therefore, a text's author is a father, a progenitor, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis."⁵⁸

Because Gilbert and Gubar seek primarily to examine the ways in which the traditional model of authorship has been used to exclude women writers from the canon, their approach is specifically feminist, and as such, it tends to minimize historical variations on the model in the interest of presenting the larger remarkably consistent, and exclusively masculine tradition of authorship. But one such variation is of particular relevance to the charge of derivativeness that serves as a cornerstone of Stoppard criticism. Before the Romantic era, authors borrowed freely from existing writings and made no effort to cover the tracks of their borrowing. Their critics, in turn, expected such borrowing and would never have attacked their work for lacking "originality" in the sense that the term is used today. But economic changes coinciding with the ascendancy of Romanticism brought a new emphasis on "originality," and borrowed art came to be seen as not only artistically inferior, but as tantamount to theft as well. In both

their poetry and their criticism, Romantic poets placed a premium on art which created the impression of being an unmediated representation of life. Skill in craft became secondary to the authenticity of transferring real life experiences and emotions directly to the page. To use Wordsworth's famous formulation of the Romantic credo, poetry should be "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquility."⁵⁹

While critical theorists have long since demonstrated that Romantic poetry is far from unmediated, popular criticism continues to value the impression of originality very highly, in part because, as Michel Foucault argues, the notion of originality is supported by bourgeois economic values. He explains that literature "was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act--an act placed in the bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous."⁶⁰ We only began to think of texts as having authors when "authors became subject to punishment"⁶¹ for writing transgressive, illicit, blasphemous texts. When "a system of ownership for texts came into being . . . at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century,"⁶² "literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed"⁶³ with an author or owner. Once authors and their works were "placed in the system of property that characterizes our society,"⁶⁴ "once strict rules concerning

author's rights, author-publisher relations, rights of reproduction, and related matters were enacted,"⁶⁵ borrowing became a scandal. To avoid charges of theft, authors had to make great efforts to feign originality, to cover the tracks of their borrowing.

In spite of all the energy writers have expended trying to cover up the scandal of borrowing, few critical theorists have been fooled. Especially in the twentieth century, literary theorists have actively worked to demonstrate that all writing is borrowed, that the concept of originality is grounded in untenable assumptions. As Gilbert and Gubar summarize, "That writers assimilate and then consciously or unconsciously affirm or deny the achievements of their predecessors is, of course, a central fact of literary history, a fact whose aesthetic and metaphysical implications have been discussed in detail by theorists as diverse as T.S. Eliot, M.H. Abrams, Erich Auerbach, and Frank Kermode."⁶⁶

Even as notoriously conservative a critic as T.S. Eliot, for example, writes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" of the widespread but misleading "tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else."⁶⁷ Eliot explains that if we put such prejudices aside, "we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors,

assert their immortality most vigorously.⁶⁸ Great poetry, Eliot maintains, has little to do with a "realistic" translation of personal emotions into poetry: "It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting."⁶⁹ Instead, great poetry is that which makes most full use of the tradition of poetry, drawing existing works into a new fusion of writing.

J. Hillis Miller and Bertolt Brecht go considerably further than Eliot in exposing the baselessness of the traditional concept of originality in authorship. Miller approaches the issue by demonstrating the inevitability of derivativeness in art. In "The Critic as Host," he states that "The poem, however, any poem, is, it is easy to see, parasitical in its turn on earlier poems, or contains earlier poems as enclosed parasites within itself, in another version of the perpetual reversal of parasite and host."⁷⁰ Thus, Miller more than defuses the charge of parasitism by celebrating borrowing in artistic creation. Brecht, on the other hand, broaches the topic by challenging the traditional God-like authority of the author, saying, "People are used to seeing poets as unique and slightly unnatural beings who reveal with a truly god-like assurance things that other people can only recognize after much sweat and toil."⁷¹ As a practicing playwright, Brecht is in much the same position that Stoppard found himself in when he

tried to convince Joan Juliet Buck that dramatists do not write plays because they have some special, omniscient understanding of life. Stoppard's mundane alternative to the god-like playwright--the writer as a craftsperson with a facility for language and dramatic structure--certainly pales in comparison to the "unique and slightly unnatural beings" of the popular view of the author, but Stoppard apparently felt compelled to admit that playwrights are not gods. Brecht follows his comment about god-like authors with a similar admission: "It is naturally distasteful to have to admit that one does not belong to this select band. All the same, it must be admitted."⁷²

Roland Barthes follows suit in viewing the God-like Author and the privileging of originality as erroneous critical notions and offers brief comments on the political implications of revising these concepts. In his exploration of the traditional concept of Authorship, Barthes describes the old conception of the Author as being "in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child,"⁷³ using the metaphor of masculine procreation noted by Gilbert and Gubar. Barthes contrasts the outdated Author (a term he capitalizes to emphasize the traditional link between the Author and God) to the contemporary scriptor, who is seen as a weaver of codes, essentially a collage-maker, rather than as the originator of his writing. Like Eliot and Miller, Barthes acknowledges the impossibility

of originality in art, describing the text as "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture,"⁷⁴ and not drawn, as the old view had it, from the life experiences of the Author. As Barthes explains, "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."⁷⁵

This revised view of the author demands a revision of the critical activity, for if the Author is no longer seen as the origin of his text, he can no longer provide the key to determining its "meaning." "Once the Author is removed," Barthes explains, "the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."⁷⁶ During the reign of the Author, the critic sought to discover the Author beneath the work, thereby "explaining" the work. But when the work is accepted as a collage of existing writings, accepted as having many, ultimately untraceable "origins," the critic can no longer close the text by discovering its "single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God)."⁷⁷ Barthes describes the revised task of the critic: "In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath."⁷⁸

Inasmuch as it contributes to a decentralization of authority, Barthes sees "truly revolutionary" implications in this revised critical activity: "In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases--reason, science, law."⁷⁹ In Barthes's view, the authority vested in the Author by the old model shuts out the reader, reducing him or her to passively discovering the secret message encoded in the text by the Author-God. Barthes's primary goal in advocating "the Death of the Author" is to restore the active role of readers, for under the revised model, readers rather than writers are the locus of meaning: "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost."⁸⁰

In spite of his primary concern with restoring the active role of readers, Barthes also sees a role for writers in bringing about this desired revision. "Though the sway of the Author remains powerful (the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate it), it goes without saying that certain writers have long since attempted to loosen it."⁸¹ He cites the case of Mallarmé, in whose work "it is language which speaks, not the author."⁸² Certainly Stoppard

numbers with Mallarmé among those scriptors whose texts illustrate that writing is always a collage of other texts rather than some sort of direct transference of life experiences into art. Unfortunately, the critical response to Stoppard illustrates just as vividly that "the sway of the Author remains powerful," for there has been all too little recognition of Stoppard's strides in dismantling the concept of the Author/Father/God and all too much condemnation of his plays for not rendering life experiences "realistically" on the stage. This misreading has in turn led critics to overlook the possibility of there being "truly revolutionary" implications in Stoppard's demystification of the Author.

In his thought provoking essay, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," Craig Owens also investigates the political ramifications of dismantling the "crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions"⁸³ as the sine qua non of postmodernism and proceeds to raise some compelling questions about the work of Sherrie Levine that we might just as appropriately raise about Stoppard's work. Levine takes photographs--Walker Evans's photographs and Edward Weston's photographs--and redispays them, much as Stoppard takes Shakespeare's Hamlet, Beckett's Waiting for Godot, and Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest and replays them. Owens asks about Levine's work:

Is she simply dramatizing the diminished possibilities for creativity in an image-saturated culture, as is often repeated? Or is her refusal of authorship not in fact a refusal of the role of creator as "father" of his work of the paternal rights assigned the author by law?⁸⁴

Though Owens argues that such a refusal of authorship has a different meaning when performed by a woman instead of a man--"when women are concerned, similar techniques have very different meanings"⁸⁵--it seems to me that Stoppard's blatant borrowing amounts to a refusal of authorship quite similar to Levine's: regardless of their respective genders, the strategies of both seem equally clear-cut refusals of mastery.

Owens explores the political dimension of mastery as he contrasts modernism and postmodernism. He characterizes modernism as the era of the grands récits or master narratives such as Marxism which sought to be the "single theoretical discourse,"⁸⁶ thought to provide the final answer. In the postmodern era, "the grands récits of modernity--the dialectic of the Spirit, the emancipation of the worker, the accumulation of wealth, the classless society--have all lost credibility."⁸⁷ Owens is clearly not sad to observe the passing of master narratives, for he finds their effect far from liberating; in fact, he finds them enslaving and imperialistic:

For what made the grands récits of modernity master narratives if not the fact that they were all narratives of mastery, of man seeking his telos in the conquest of nature? What function

did these narratives play other than to legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image?⁸⁸

The desire of Western man for domination and control has been palpably challenged in the twentieth century by "the emergence of Third-World nations, the 'revolt of nature' and the women's movement--that is, the voices of the conquered."⁸⁹ At least two options are open to those faced with the "tremendous loss of mastery"⁹⁰ which characterizes the postmodern era: "therapeutic programs, from both the Left and the Right, for recuperating that loss"⁹¹ or the more gracious and politically progressive, not to mention inevitable, acceptance of this loss of mastery, even refusal of mastery, as both Stoppard and Levine have done.

Owens's essay is invaluable for the light it sheds not only on the specific critical response to Stoppard but also on the larger, currently fashionable, but facile assumption that adherence to Marxism serves as proof of political progressivism. Owens's stinging indictment of the arrogance underlying master narratives, of the arrogance of mastery itself, helps provide the sort of perspective needed to go beyond easy assumptions about what makes art political and ask more enlightening questions about what is truly progressive. It goes without saying that Stoppard's politics appear far less suspect when viewed in light of Owens's remarks, for the blatant borrowing that characterizes Stoppard's work seems more a deliberate refusal of the

mastery of authorship than a sign of incompetence and inferiority. This reading of Stoppard's borrowing as a refusal of mastery is buttressed by the playwright's repeated insistence that he does not write to present the final truth to his audience. "I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself. I'm the kind of person who embarks on an endless leapfrog down the great moral issues. I put a position, rebut it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation."⁹² Stoppard goes so far as to designate his lack of certainty as the dominant characteristic of his work: "What I think of as being my distinguishing mark is an absolute lack of certainty about almost anything."⁹³ Thus, it seems clear that Stoppard is intent upon refusing the white robe and beard of the God-like Author who creates his original masterpiece out of nothing and presents his audience with the final "Truth."

While Owens's exploration is extraordinarily useful in understanding the political implications of refusing Authorship, we still might feel compelled to wonder about the remarkable vehemence of the attacks on Stoppard's work. Why do critics so often assume a tone of moral indignation when they discuss the derivativeness of his work? Why do disease and parasite metaphors form such recurring motifs in the condemnations? Why does the critical hierarchy favoring originality over derivativeness continue to carry so much

weight in spite of an entire body of critical and creative writing which establishes the impossibility, indeed the undesirability, of originality in art? What is at stake here?

What is at stake when an author borrows as boldly as Stoppard does is something more than a specifically Romantic notion of authorship. Such blatant borrowing is also more than a mere transgression of property rights. Far from being a relatively recent historical development, the aversion to derivativeness, the fear of copies, reaches all the way back at least to its codification in the second and third chapters of Genesis, where we find, in fitting proximity to the first chapter's sacred tale of creation, the still very influential story of the dangers of copied art. As virtually every Westerner over the age of five knows, "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."⁹⁴ In contrast to Adam, who was sculpted by God Himself, Eve is a mere copy made from original man. "The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and . . . made he a woman."⁹⁵ To underscore the difference between Adam, God's original art work, and Eve, the copy, Genesis presents Eve as a bodily creature while Adam is specifically described as possessing a soul. When God breathed life into Adam, "man became a living soul"⁹⁶ (my

italics); but we search in vain for mention of Eve's soul and find instead Adam's pronouncement: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: and she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of man."⁹⁷

The connection between the manner of creation and the relative status of the work in question is highlighted by the Hebrew myth of Lilith, whose story is part of Jewish lore, though not part of the authorized scriptures. Lilith was Adam's first wife, but like him she was created by God from the dust of the earth, and was not, therefore, copied from the original. Since she was made in the same way as Adam, Lilith "considered herself his equal"⁹⁸ and "objected to lying beneath him."⁹⁹ When Adam tried to force Lilith into submission, she ran away and refused to return even after God vowed to put a hundred of her demon babies to death every day until she submitted. Though the main function of the Lilith myth is undoubtedly to illustrate the dangers of autonomous woman, it also points clearly to the importance of the means of creation in determining the status of what is created. When man and woman are both created by God from the dust, as in the Lilith myth, both are original creations and there is no relationship of superiority and inferiority.

While the second chapter of Genesis points to the inherent superiority of original art (Adam has a soul while derivative Eve is only body), the third chapter goes further

by warning of the dangers of giving in to the enticement of a mere copy, the enticement of Eve, for it was Eve who listened to the serpent and caused the fall of humanity. The Scriptures describe the fall in terms of succumbing to desire: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat."¹⁰⁰ When Eve, the derivative one, gave in to sensual desire and the desire for knowledge, she enabled culture to invade the inside of Eden, originary nature. But the fall was not complete until Eve offered the fruit to Adam, and man, made by God in his own image, succumbed to the enticement of derivative woman, thereby corrupting the soul of man forevermore.

In this manner, the widely disseminated myth teaches that derivativeness is inferior to originality just as the body is weaker than the soul and woman is inferior to man. But derivativeness is more than just inferior to originality; it is a constant danger that threatens to corrupt the soul and elicit God's wrath. Given the power of the tale in Western culture, and given the countless reiterations of the values embodied in the tale, it is no wonder that the prejudice against derivativeness is so pervasive and persistent.

Thus, one of the legacies of the Adam and Eve myth is a powerful revulsion to derivativeness which manifests

itself in critical values. This deep-seated mistrust of derivativeness clearly operates in Stoppard criticism, fueling disease and parasite metaphors, feeding indignant insistencies that Stoppard's derivative work should be excluded from the canon, kept out of the garden of original theater. The tone of moral indignation found in so much anti-Stoppard criticism begins to make sense when we recognize that original and derivative have never been innocent critical terms, devoid of moral and political implications. Instead, the terms are caught up in an entire structure of morals and values which are situated at the heart of the western tradition.

Jacques Derrida refers to this structure as the "metaphysics of presence" or "logocentrism." Translator Barbara Johnson summarizes Derrida's view that Western thought "has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities":¹⁰¹ original versus derivative, soul versus body, man versus woman, good versus evil. The terms do not, however, enjoy equal status. As Derrida explains: "In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position."¹⁰² In the original/derivative hierarchy, it is originality which dominates and commands, drawing its power from a whole framework of supporting oppositions in which good, man, and soul occupy commanding positions over evil, woman, and body.

These hierarchies are instances of the "metaphysics of presence" or "logocentrism" because the first terms in the above list or pairs--original, soul, man, good--are seen as being in a position of relative proximity to presence, to God, to logos, or to a source. Derrida explains that "all the terms related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of presence-- . . . consciousness or conscience, God, man, and so forth."¹⁰³ While the first or favored terms have in common the constant of presence, the second terms in the list--derivative, body, woman, evil--are devalued because they are defined by their removal from presence. The Adam and Eve myth provides a vivid manifestation of this phenomenon: man, possessor of a soul, was made directly by God and is, therefore, defined by his nearness to the source, to logos, while bodily woman, the disfavored member of the pair, was made from Adam and is thus defined by her removal from the presence of God, the source. "Original" art is likewise favored because it is seen as stemming immediately from the Author-source while derivative art is disfavored because it is seen as being removed from the Author-source inasmuch as it is "copied" from other art.

Derrida and other deconstructionists, including many feminist critical theorists, seek to dismantle such philosophical and critical hierarchies. Perhaps the first step in deconstructing a hierarchy is "to work through the

structural genealogy of [the] concepts in the most scrupulous and immanent fashion"¹⁰⁴ in order to demonstrate "the systematic and historical solidarity of the concepts and gestures of thought that one often believes can be innocently separated."¹⁰⁵ By tracing, for example, the original/derivative hierarchy back to its codification in the Book of Origins, we reveal the complicities between the favoring of originality over derivativeness and the favoring of man, soul, and good over woman, body, and evil. While we are accustomed to thinking of originality and derivativeness as merely innocent critical terms, terms without moral or political significance, deconstruction brings the recognition that the original/derivative hierarchy cannot be innocently separated from the hierarchies which support it--and these supporting hierarchies (man/woman, soul/body) have moral and political implications which are impossible to overlook.

In On Deconstruction, Jonathan Culler focuses on the importance of this kind of recognition in his discussion of the impact of deconstruction on literary criticism: "By disrupting the hierarchical relations on which critical concepts and methods depend, [deconstruction] prevents concepts and methods from being taken for granted and treated as simply reliable instruments. Critical categories are not just tools to be employed in producing sound interpretations but problems to be explored."¹⁰⁶ Rather than

accepting critical tools as reliable instruments, deconstruction often works by "revealing the interested, ideological nature of [the impositions]"¹⁰⁷ on which critical concepts and methods depend. In this manner, Culler explains, deconstruction "can be seen as a politicizing of what might otherwise be thought a neutral framework."¹⁰⁸ An important distinction must be made here. A deconstructive move does not suddenly transform a neutral, apolitical discourse into a politicized one. Instead, deconstruction encourages the recognition that literary criticism has always been interested and ideological, even though these political implications have long been ignored. In "The Conflict of Faculties," Derrida explains that while many people will be incapable of tapping the political potential of deconstruction, this political potential is nevertheless there: deconstruction is "at the very least, a way of taking a position, in its work of analysis, concerning the political and institutional structures that make possible and govern our practices, our competencies, our performances. . . ." This means that, too political for some, it will seem paralyzing to those who only recognize politics by its most familiar roadsigns."¹⁰⁹

Fortunately, many feminist critical theorists have avoided both traps. Recognizing the obvious political implications of logocentrism's disfavoring of women, they have worked to reveal the ways in which the metaphysics of

presence, or to use the Derridean term they prefer, "phallogocentrism unites an interest in patriarchal authority, unity of meaning, and certainty of origin."¹¹⁰ These are precisely the concerns which have been so central to the critique of Stoppard's work: according to the traditional view, the derivativeness of Stoppard's plays makes their origin highly uncertain, thereby disrupting their unity of meaning and reducing their patriarchal authority. Feminist critical theorists have simply not accepted the traditional view of authorship implied in such an assessment. Instead, they "investigate whether the procedures, assumptions, and goals of current criticism are in complicity with the preservation of male authority."¹¹¹

Their investigation of this complicity has followed many avenues, but perhaps none is more pertinent to an assessment of Stoppard's work than the investigation of the assumptions underlying the traditional view of the author. From a feminist perspective, the all-encompassing concern with certainty of origin in authorship seems symptomatic of a transference to the critical realm of masculine anxieties about procreation and legitimacy. Culler summarizes Dorothy Dinnerstein's observation that "fathers, because of their lack of direct physical connection with babies, have a powerful urge to assert a relation, giving the child their name to establish a genealogical link."¹¹² In addition, men have traditionally made great "efforts to control

the sexual life of women to make sure that the children they sponsor really do come from their own seed."¹¹³ Patriarchal criticism adopts these bio-sexual concerns, treating the text as the author-father's child, assigning the author-father legal rights to the text, and as is clearly seen in Stoppard criticism, treating any text of uncertain origin as a bastard-text.

Undoubtedly, then, the traditional model of authorship is interested on many, if not all levels, and the interests it represents are too clear to require further comment. Recognizing that the model is indeed interested and ideological, we move closer to understanding why the model remains so powerful even though so many critical theorists have shown it to be a highly misleading critical tool. As Eliot realized, the tendency to praise what is "original" and "individual" in art leads us to overlook the very thing that made the work "great"--the work's incorporation of existing writing. By continuing to insist on originality in art, by clinging to a theological model of authorship, critics misrepresent the process of artistic creation, for earthly authors have never created ex nihilo. The one truly original act of creation is mythic, and critics could proceed more productively if this mythic model were placed aside.

Furthermore, a look at the canon indicates that the standard of originality has always been inconsistently

applied, revealing that critics have, perhaps necessarily, been of two minds on the issue. Oedipus Tyrannos, for example, has long been highly valued even though we know that Sophocles wrought the play from widely known material. We value the play as much for its incorporation of cultural values, made possible because the play is derivative, as for its excellent craft. Similarly, we know that Shakespeare made Hamlet from earlier versions of Hamlet, that Beckett and Brecht draw heavily on existing theatrical traditions to make their plays. "Stylistically speaking, there is nothing all that new about the epic theatre," Brecht explains. "Its expository character and its emphasis on virtuosity bring it close to the old Asiatic theatre. Didactic tendencies are to be found in the medieval mystery plays and the classical Spanish theatre, and also in the theatre of the Jesuits."¹¹⁴ With the possible exception of medieval mystery plays, the sources Brecht names are all relatively unfamiliar to most of us, suggesting that we do not readily recognize these sources when we watch a performance of a Brecht play. Similarly, due to historical distancing, we may not readily recognize the sources Sophocles and Shakespeare used. This distance from or unfamiliarity with sources makes it possible for us to join the critics, the keepers of the canon, in forgetting, willfully or otherwise, the highly derivative nature of plays we value. This "forgetting," in turn, allows us simultaneously to value derivative plays and to value originality

in art. If we could cast aside the blinders imposed by the theological model of authorship, we might resolve this contradiction by seeing that derivativeness is far more essential to the art we value than originality.

We might see further that the insistence on originality poses a far greater threat to the garden of theater, to the canon, than the misplaced fear of derivativeness. Though we are indeed fortunate that, through the process of "forgetting," many plays have escaped censure for derivative-ness, the canon remains at risk nevertheless, for as long as critics insist on the phallogocentric model as the sole, legitimate model, we risk exclusion of any play that does not conform to this rigid, interested prescription. Since the model is exclusively masculine, it works toward the exclusion of all non-masculine authors. Another look at the canon reveals the paucity of women playwrights, and we recognize that the model works first to discourage women from writing (lacking a penis, she cannot hope to effec-tively wield a pen, the patriarchs have often repeated¹¹⁵), and then, for those few who overcome an entire tradition and write anyway, it works to cast their writing as suspect, illegitimate, or parasitic.

Moreover, the model works to exclude male authors such as Stoppard who choose an authorial strategy other than the single, legitimate one prescribed by the model. Of course, Stoppard's plays have not in fact been shut out of the

canon--they are widely anthologized, frequently performed, and constantly written about. But the plays have been accepted in spite of widespread, lingering suspicion that their derivativeness is a weakness that detracts from their artistic merit. Robert Egan accurately describes the evolution in the critical response to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead by noting that although "we are well beyond Robert Brustein's early charge of 'theatrical parasitism,'" "several studies that have since appeared echo Brustein's definition (though without the pejorative sense) of Stoppard's play in terms of Beckett's."¹¹⁶ The same sort of evolution can be traced in the critical response to other Stoppard plays: in general, while critics no longer openly denounce the plays as inferior theatrical parasites, they still tend to apologize for Stoppard's derivativeness, tend to explain away the open borrowing as an unfortunate weakness in otherwise worthy plays.

What has been lacking in Stoppard criticism, though, is the vital next step in this evolution, namely, the recognition that Stoppard's borrowing is a thing greatly to be desired. Far from being an unfortunate weakness, Stoppard's derivativeness is an integral part of his multi-level challenge to the traditional model of originality, a model that is politically conservative, morally suspect, and highly misleading as a critical tool. Because Stoppard so vividly foregrounds his borrowing, he forces us to come

to terms with the inevitable derivativeness of all writing. We cannot watch or read a Stoppard play and leave with our functioning ambivalence intact: the plays do not allow us the convenient process of "forgetting" that art is derivative. Not only are we confronted with unmistakably borrowed material--undisguised segments from Hamlet, The Importance of Being Earnest, Eliot's poetry, and whatever else was in Stoppard's hat when he assembled the play in question--but we are also, via the content of the plays, drawn into extended consideration of the nature of authorship. Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead asks us to consider the author's role in determining the fate of characters as the usually buried metaphor equating the playwright with God, the source of fate, is exhumed, opened up for investigation. In Travesties, we face squarely the question of the origin of art, as "authors" with widely diverging political views all nevertheless make their art in the same way--by pulling it out of a hat. The Real Thing coyly tempts us to identify Henry, the character-playwright, with Stoppard, the "real" playwright, and then pulls the rug out from under us repeatedly as the play discredits the view of authorship implicit in such identification.

By reading Stoppard's open derivativeness as a challenge to the traditional model of authorship, we gain a more integrated understanding of the relationship between the form and content of his plays, and we move, not incidentally,

toward a more productive, less prejudiced set of critical tools. Moreover, we lose nothing in the process, for in leaving behind the theological, phallocentric model of authorship, we assign to the scrap heap a model that has always been highly misleading, has always misrepresented the process of artistic creation. And as we scrap this outdated model, we also move closer to dismantling the related original/derivative hierarchy that has likewise always been more a morality laden pair of blinders than a useful tool for assessing the value of art.

Notes

¹Tom Stoppard, Travesties (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 18. All further quotations refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text. Unless otherwise noted, ellipses are Stoppard's.

²Jim Hunter, Tom Stoppard's Plays (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 240. Hunter provides a full "translation" from nonsense to French to English of Tzara's opening four-line poem.

³David Bratt, Introduction to Tom Stoppard: A Reference Guide (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982), p. xviii.

⁴Bratt, p. xviii.

⁵Robert Brustein, "Waiting for Hamlet," New Republic, 4 November 1967, p. 25.

⁶Brustein, "Waiting," p. 26.

⁷Brustein, "Waiting," p. 26.

⁸Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind," in The Norton Introduction to Literature, shorter 3rd ed., eds. Carl E. Bain, Jerome Beaty, and J. Paul Hunter (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1982), p. 497.

⁹Christopher Nichols, "Theater: R & G: A Minority Report," National Review, 12 December 1967, p. 1394.

¹⁰R.H. Lee, "The Circle and Its Tangent," Theoria: A Journal of Studies in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences 33 (October 1969): 37-43.

¹¹C.O. Gardner, "Correspondence: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Theoria: A Journal of Studies in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences 34 (May 1970): 83.

¹²Gardner, p. 83.

¹³John Simon, "Theater Chronicle," Hudson Review 29 (Spring 1976): 79.

¹⁴Simon, p. 79.

¹⁵Philip Roberts, "Tom Stoppard: Serious Artist or Siren?" Critical Quarterly 20 (Autumn 1978): 86-87.

¹⁶Roberts, p. 87.

¹⁷Robert Brustein, "Robert Brustein on Theater: A Theater for Clever Journalists," New Republic, 5 January 1980, p. 23.

¹⁸Brustein, "Clever Journalists," p. 23.

¹⁹Brustein, "Clever Journalists," p. 23.

²⁰Joan Juliet Buck, "Tom Stoppard: Kind Heart and Prickly Mind," Vogue, March 1984, p. 454.

²¹Buck, p. 514.

²²Buck, p. 514.

²³Tom Stoppard, "Ambushes for the Audience: Toward a High Comedy of Ideas," Theatre Quarterly 4 (May-July 1974): 13.

²⁴Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 12.

²⁵Hunter, p. 197.

²⁶Hunter, p. 197.

²⁷Kenneth Tynan, "Profile: Withdrawing with Style from the Chaos," New Yorker, 19 December 1977, p. 43.

²⁸Tynan, p. 43.

²⁹Tynan, p. 42.

³⁰Tynan, p. 42.

³¹Joan Fitzpatrick Dean, Tom Stoppard: Comedy as a Moral Matrix (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1981), p. 108.

³²Hunter, p. 197.

³³Tynan, p. 45.

³⁴Victor L. Cahn, Beyond Absurdity: The Plays of Tom Stoppard (Rutherford, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1979), p. 143.

³⁵Cahn, p. 155.

³⁶Cahn, p. 155.

³⁷Cahn, p. 155.

³⁸Carol Billman, "The Art of History in Tom Stoppard's Travesties," Kansas Quarterly 12 (Fall 1980): 52.

³⁹Bobbie Rothstein, "The Reappearance of Public Man: Stoppard's Jumpers and Professional Foul," Kansas Quarterly 12 (Fall 1980): 35.

⁴⁰Rothstein, p. 40.

⁴¹Rothstein, p. 40.

⁴²Rothstein, p. 43.

⁴³Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 11.

⁴⁴Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 11.

⁴⁵Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 11.

⁴⁶Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 11.

⁴⁷Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 12.

⁴⁸Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 12.

⁴⁹Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 24.

⁵⁰Eagleton, p. 24. Eagleton is summarizing and concurring with an argument made by Georg Lukacs.

⁵¹ Genesis 1:1, The New Oxford Annotated Bible, revised standard version, eds. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977).

⁵² Genesis 1:3, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, 1:20, 1:24, and 1:29, The New Oxford Annotated Bible.

⁵³ The New Oxford Annotated Bible, footnote, p. 1.

⁵⁴ I use the definitions offered by the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.

⁵⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 4.

⁵⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 6.

⁵⁹ William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (Atlanta: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 441.

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, ed. Joseu Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. 148.

⁶¹ Foucault, p. 148.

⁶² Foucault, p. 148.

⁶³ Foucault, p. 149.

⁶⁴ Foucault, p. 149.

⁶⁵ Foucault, p. 148.

⁶⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 46.

⁶⁷ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (Atlanta: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 784.

⁶⁸ Eliot, p. 784.

⁶⁹ Eliot, p. 787.

⁷⁰ J. Hillis Miller, "The Limits of Pluralism. III. The Critic as Host," Critical Inquiry 3 (Spring 1977): 446.

⁷¹Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," in Brecht on Theatre, trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 73.

⁷²Brecht, p. 73.

⁷³Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 145.

⁷⁴Barthes, p. 146.

⁷⁵Barthes, p. 146.

⁷⁶Barthes, p. 147.

⁷⁷Barthes, p. 146.

⁷⁸Barthes, p. 147.

⁷⁹Barthes, p. 147.

⁸⁰Barthes, p. 148.

⁸¹Barthes, p. 143.

⁸²Barthes, p. 143.

⁸³Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 57.

⁸⁴Owens, p. 73.

⁸⁵Owens, p. 73.

⁸⁶Owens, p. 64.

⁸⁷Owens, p. 64. Owens refers to Jean-Francois Lyotard, La condition postmoderne (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 8.

⁸⁸Owens, pp. 65-66.

⁸⁹Owens, p. 67.

⁹⁰Owens, p. 67.

⁹¹Owens, p. 67.

⁹²Mel Gussow, "Stoppard Refutes Himself, Endlessly," New York Times, 26 April 1972, p. 54.

⁹³Cited in Ronald Hayman, Tom Stoppard, Contemporary Playwrights Series, 3rd ed. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 40.

⁹⁴Genesis 2:7. All further biblical references are to the King James Version.

⁹⁵Genesis 2:21-22.

⁹⁶Genesis 2:7.

⁹⁷Genesis 2:23.

⁹⁸Gilbert and Gubar, p. 35.

⁹⁹Gilbert and Gubar, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰Genesis 3:6.

¹⁰¹Barbara Johnson, Translator's Introduction to Dissemination, by Jacques Derrida (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. viii.

¹⁰²Jacques Derrida, Positions, quoted by Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), p. 85.

¹⁰³Jacques Derrida, L'écriture et la différence, quoted in Translator's Preface to Of Grammatology by Jacques Derrida, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. xxi.

¹⁰⁴Jacques Derrida, Positions, quoted in Culler, p. 86.

¹⁰⁵Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁶Culler, p. 180.

¹⁰⁷Culler, p. 166.

¹⁰⁸Culler, p. 156.

¹⁰⁹Derrida, "The Conflict of Faculties," quoted in Culler, p. 156.

¹¹⁰Culler, p. 61.

¹¹¹Culler, p. 61.

¹¹²Culler, p. 60.

113 Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 80.

114 Brecht, pp. 75-76.

115 Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate in the introduction to The Madwoman in the Attic the consistent linking of the pen with the penis. See pages 3-16.

116 Robert Egan, "A Thin Beam of Light: The Purpose of Playing in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Theatre Journal 31 (March 1979): 59.

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD OR
TOM STOPPARD DOESN'T KNOW

Dislocation of an audience's assumptions is an important part of what I like to write.

--Tom Stoppard¹

Even before the curtain rises on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Stoppard has begun the process of dislocating his audience's assumptions, for the very title indicates a central, "dislocating" fact about the play, the fact that has been at the heart of the critical controversy surrounding Stoppard's first major stage success: the play is derivative. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are drawn, not from life, but from art. And once the curtain rises, this dislocation of assumptions continues unabated as we realize that Stoppard is not only replaying Hamlet, but is incorporating essential elements of Waiting for Godot as well. Stoppard's borrowing operates at virtually all levels, from the all-encompassing frame of Hamlet, to repetitions of Hamlet as the play-within-the-play, to the Beckettian scenario of two men waiting on a vacant stage, to specific echoes of lines from Hamlet, Godot, and other works. This blatant and pervasive borrowing specifically dislocates

assumptions about originality in art, for Stoppard clearly makes no effort to pretend that Rosencrantz is an unmediated representation of life. Such an implicit challenge to the primacy of originality in art in turn raises questions about the concept of authorship and the nature of representation (what do authors do if not look at life and then represent it in art?), questions which, not coincidentally, have a direct bearing on the major thematic issues explored within the play.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, modelled after Vladimir and Estragon, caught up in the script of Hamlet, develop an interest in sources and origins, and as we join them in trying to determine where they came from, the derivativeness of the play intensifies the futility of our joint search, for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, like the play, have no single origin. The play's derivativeness intervenes in the same way as we participate in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's search for their end, their fate. Stoppard juxtaposes the Renaissance tragic vision of Hamlet (death is part of a grand design) with the modern absurdist vision of Godot (death is as meaningless as life), unmasking both, revealing them as artificial constructs based upon different assumptions about life, neither of which is endorsed as a uniquely valid way of representing reality. This juxtaposition leaves us, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with no firm ground to stand on as we try to explain their

deaths. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die because, as the Player explains, "It is written"²--no God, not even an absent Godot, only an implied author passively assembling an already written story. Thus, the whole concept of fate is thoroughly undermined as Stoppard refuses us the stable ground of a fixed theatrical mode which corresponds to life; the end of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is refracted and reflected through layers of art which may not at all be rooted in a valid relationship with life. Lest we try to push aside the realization that both the origin and the end of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are art, not life, Stoppard foregrounds debates, discussions, and demonstrations concerning the possibilities and limitations of illusion and representation. Guildenstern tells a series of stories espousing the virtues of believing in an illusion which is clearly at odds with reality; the Player teaches several lessons concerning the conventions of the theater; and we see "death" performed repeatedly in a variety of theatrical modes only to hear the performance critiqued by the onstage audience immediately afterwards. In the end, the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become an opening into the question of how the theater works, and the assumptions audiences traditionally rely on to frame their responses are completely dislocated.

While it seems clear that Stoppard's blatantly derivative authorial strategy is a uniquely well-suited vehicle

for exploring the issues raised within the play, surprisingly enough, critics are only beginning to ask the rather old-fashioned New Critical question of how the form works with the content of Rosencrantz. Critics have for the most part overlooked the relationship between the outside and the inside, addressing either the derivativeness of the play or its content, but only rarely asking whether the two work together in any special way. Early reviewers often focused on Stoppard's derivativeness, and they found nothing to admire. Robert Brustein's complaints are easily the most well-known--he labelled the play a "theatrical parasite, feeding off Hamlet, Waiting for Godot, and Six Characters in Search of an Author"³ and rechristened it "Waiting for Hamlet"⁴--but his was by no means a lonely, dissenting voice. C.O. Gardner joined the chorus of condemnations, denouncing the play as "a swill, composed of second-hand Beckett, third-hand Kafka, and the goon show,"⁵ and, as such, thoroughly unworthy of "serious critical attention."⁶ Likewise, Christopher Nichols found the play's stage success surprising since he saw "no stinging innovation"⁷ in Rosencrantz. According to the early critical consensus, then, the derivativeness of Stoppard's play constituted an artistic weakness of the most grave nature, a weakness of sufficient magnitude to relegate the play to the ash-heap.

Instead of fading into oblivion, however, Rosencrantz is, as Robert Egan observes (borrowing one of the play's

own lines), "gathering weight as it goes on."⁸ As the play began to show signs of becoming a "modern classic,"⁹ the critical response slowly grew more accommodating, but the legacy of Brustein's charge has continued to haunt the play. Normand Berlin saw some good in the play, arguing in "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead: Theater of Criticism" that "what Stoppard does best" is "to help us realize 'how remarkable Shakespeare is.'"¹⁰ But while Berlin thought the play might succeed as criticism of Hamlet, he thought it largely failed as a play, agreeing whole-heartedly with Brustein's assessment: "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is a derivative play, correctly characterized by Robert Brustein as a 'theatrical parasite.'"¹¹ After repeating Brustein's version of the play's genealogy, he elaborated, "Stoppard goes to Shakespeare for his characters, for the background to his play's action, and for some direct quotations, to Pirandello for the idea of giving extradramatic life to established characters, to Beckett for the tone, the philosophical thrust, and for some comic routines."¹² Berlin's move toward some sort of critical accommodation is clearly a small step, for while it is true that criticism is an important part of Rosencrantz, Berlin sees this critical element as strictly limited to an elucidation of Hamlet rather than as an exploration of the tragic genre and even of the nature of theater, and more importantly, he retains the assumption that criticism is

itself basically parasitical, so that Stoppard's play about art is less worthy than a play about life.

As the play continued to gather more weight, critics largely dropped the condemnations of Stoppard's borrowing as they embarked on detailed source studies, treating Stoppard's borrowing in much the same way they might treat Chaucer's or Shakespeare's borrowing in the pre-Romantic period, before criticism began to place such a premium on "originality" in art. Margarete Holubetz, for example, argued that the fake death scene in Webster's The White Devil is very close to, and may have served as a source for, the fake death scene in Rosencrantz¹³ while Ruby Cohn, in Modern Shakespeare Offshoots, detailed the evidence of Stoppard's thinking about two bit-players from Hamlet "through the absurdist twilight of Beckett's Godot."¹⁴ "In performance," she observed, "the Godot quality of Stoppard's couple is evident in their music-hall exchanges, their games, their boredom, their lack of memory, and their general uncertainty about their condition."¹⁵ Cohn accurately noted other similarities between Godot and Rosencrantz: "In both plays, two friends ask each other questions, tell each other stories, play with puns, clichés, pauses, repetitions, and impersonations."¹⁶ Cohn found that, "more obviously than Beckett, Stoppard introduces philosophy into the music-hall patter of his pair,"¹⁷ and she deemed this philosophical dimension valuable. But her

summary of Stoppard's use of source plays contained hints that the earlier bias against the borrowing in Rosencrantz was still at work: "Extremely skillful in dovetailing the Hamlet scenes into the Godot situation, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is a witty commentary rather than a theatrical exploration into either great work."¹⁸ While the source plays are great, her comments suggested, the derivative Rosencrantz is merely witty.

Ronald Hayman and Jill L. Levenson similarly wrote of Stoppard's play in terms of source material, observing the borrowing without condemning it, and even, in the case of Levenson, praising the derivativeness as a source of textual richness. Noting that "the public was ready for a departure from the mould of working-class anti-hero that John Osborne had established in 1956,"¹⁹ Mayman argued that "Stoppard appeared at the right moment with his beautifully engineered device for propelling two attendant lords into the foreground."²⁰ "Stoppard," Hayman continued, "was not the first playwright to incorporate generous slabs of Shakesperian dialogue into a modern text, but he was the boldest and the cleverest."²¹ Writing in Shakespeare Survey, Levenson began by observing that

As soon as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead appeared in performance, reviewers and academic commentators recognized its derivation not only from Shakespeare's Hamlet, but also from Beckett's Waiting for Godot. They have noticed other influences as well: Pirandello,

T.S. Eliot, Wilde, Kafka, and Pinter have left theatrical or literary traces, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's late Investigations provide philosophical bearings.²²

In Levenson's view, Stoppard's borrowing served as both "a means for solving practical problems of composition"²³ and a source of allusions and reverberations that make the text richer. Hamlet provided Stoppard with "a familiar text whose interpretation he could share with his audience,"²⁴ and his many other sources worked with Hamlet as threads which converge or, to use Levenson's preferred image, "transparencies stacked on top of one another."²⁵ Levenson saw Stoppard's borrowing as a major source of "the wit which has continually engaged Stoppard's audiences,"²⁶ a wit which "arises not only from his verbal ingenuity but also from the meeting of points--sometimes whole lines--in the transparencies."²⁷

Undoubtedly, these more recent studies of Stoppard's use of sources are far more productive than the earlier blanket condemnations of Stoppard's theatrical parasitism, but we need at this point to take heed of William E. Gruber's words of caution about accepting even this more fruitful approach as an adequate frame for discussing Stoppard's play, which Gruber believes "has no clear theatrical precedent."²⁸ Reviewing the commentaries of Cohn, Hayman, and Thomas Whitaker, Gruber observes, "Such language--'skillful in dovetailing,' 'beautifully engineered,' 'clever pastiche'--condemns while it praises, subtly labeling Stoppard's play

as a derivative piece of workmanship."²⁹ He continues with a most accurate comment about the critical response to art in general: "We tend to mistrust anything which is not obviously new, not wholly original."³⁰ And I could not agree more with Gruber's observation that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead ought to cause us to acknowledge some inadequacies in the vocabulary we currently use to discuss plays,"³¹ for "a workshop vocabulary proves unable to explain what occurs when the script of Hamlet mingles with the script of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead."³² The scope of this problem becomes acutely apparent when we read, for example, Richard Corballis's conclusion to the Rosencrantz chapter in his 1984 Stoppard: The Mystery and the Clockwork. Seeking to praise the play at the end of a chapter which fruitfully examines Stoppard's conflation of Hamlet and Godot, Corballis must, in the absence of more appropriately descriptive terminology, resort to a vocabulary that does not at all describe how Rosencrantz works: "Stoppard," he writes, "created an original masterpiece."³³

In spite of these "vocabulary" problems--and I submit that this weakness in critical terminology is rooted in an underlying conceptual problem that cannot be entirely resolved by a mere substitution of words--three studies that have appeared since 1979 (including Corballis's) represent major strides in the evolution of the critical response to Rosencrantz. All three critics, Robert Wilcher, Corballis,

and Michael Hinden, treat Stoppard's borrowing as an integral part of the play, praising his incorporation of a Renaissance world view, via Hamlet, into the absurdist vision of Godot.

Robert Wilcher's 1979 "The Museum of Tragedy: Endgame and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," the earliest of the studies, may be most properly classified as a transition essay, for Wilcher retains a central feature of older approaches to the play, namely, the viewing of Stoppard's play in terms of Shakespeare's. "My chief purpose," he states, "is to see what light is thrown on the plays of Beckett and Stoppard by reading them in the context of Hamlet in particular and of the tradition of tragic art alluded to by Hamm [in Endgame] in general."³⁴ But Wilcher's reading clearly goes beyond the view of Brustein and company, who see Rosencrantz as an inferior parasite feeding off great plays, and beyond that of Berlin as well, for Wilcher reads the play as a window onto the entire tradition of tragedy rather than as a commentary only on Hamlet, and he does not work from the assumption that the play's critical function is essentially parasitical. Instead, he suggests that his study of the relationship between the tradition of tragedy and Rosencrantz and Endgame may "have some bearing upon the death or survival of tragedy in the modern age."³⁵ Thus, Wilcher sees the contemporary plays as potentially life-giving rather than as life-sapping parasites.

Wilcher begins by observing that "tragedy is no longer viable as an art-form in the mid-twentieth century"³⁶ since the ethical conventions and Providential world order they rely on are no longer part of a broadly shared cultural consensus. Rosencrantz, he argues, raises "the question of the relation of modern drama to the tragic art of the past quite explicitly."³⁷ Since Stoppard cannot rely on the shared Providential world view which previously provided the basis for the structure of tragedy, he substitutes the script of Hamlet as an alternative "for a cultural consensus about the nature and meaning of the universe."³⁸ By incorporating "fragments of Shakespeare's play"³⁹ into the action, Stoppard presents "the script as a viable theatrical alternative to Destiny or Grade."⁴⁰

But Stoppard's substitution is not designed to keep alive a mode of theater that has outlived its usefulness; it works instead as an expansion of the insights Pirandello offered about the theater. The traditional "distinction between the reality of life and the unreality of the stage has been blurred and inverted in the twentieth century"⁴¹ so that, after Pirandello, all the world is no longer a stage, "but the stage is itself a world with its own laws."⁴² Whereas in the Renaissance tragedy reflected a shared view of the world as essentially orderly, in the twentieth century, only art is orderly, and the orderly world of the stage reflects only the order of art, not of life, which is

viewed as fundamentally chaotic. Stoppard's play differs from Pirandello's in that Stoppard does not have to "tell us the story in which his Characters [are] trapped as he [goes] along."⁴³ He "can rely on his audience's knowledge of the source play, Hamlet."⁴⁴

Thus, Wilcher argues, "The universe of the modern characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, is not the Renaissance macrocosm of Prince Hamlet, Shakespeare, and the Elizabethan audience, but Hamlet the play--and it is important to stress again that it is not a view of the world but a familiarity with Hamlet that is shared by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Stoppard, and the twentieth-century audience."⁴⁵ By using Hamlet as a "formal equivalent for the agreement between dramatist and audience on which tragedy depends,"⁴⁶ Stoppard's presentation of the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern becomes an opening onto the workings of tragedy and of the theater as a whole. Why, Wilcher asks, "should Shakespeare bother to tell us what happened to two insignificant attendant lords?"⁴⁷ "Such is the fate of those who inhabit the world of the stage," we realize, "where aesthetic laws apply as well as moral ones."⁴⁸ The divinity that shapes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's ends, unlike the Divinity that shapes Hamlet's end, does not extend beyond the world of the stage. While the death of Hamlet reaches out of the play to confirm a world view, the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, no less in Shakespeare's

play than in Stoppard's, are mandated by the order of art, which requires that there be no loose ends. While Wilcher suggests that Stoppard's confirmation of the order of art allows us to "still share a belief in the creative power of the artist"⁴⁹ in an age "when we may doubt the existence of a Creator or a Providence,"⁵⁰ I believe Stoppard's extension of Pirandello's strategy may have the opposite effect. Instead of reinforcing the Author/Father/God *topos*, Stoppard unmasks the model, revealing that the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never had any connection to Providence, that Shakespeare was not so much presenting Divinity at work as simply tying up a thread in the plot in order to produce a well-made, orderly play.

In his 1980 "Extending the Audience: The Structure of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" (which he revises slightly for his book on Stoppard), Richard Corballis begins with a different emphasis but treats Stoppard's use of Hamlet in much the same way as Wilcher. Noting that critics who do not accept Brustein's assessment of the play tend to accept Berlin's, Corballis dissents, arguing that "although the 'overt' themes of the play may look derivative, 'forced and jejune' on the page, I have always found them highly effective and even moving in the theatre."⁵¹ He similarly rejects the consensus that Stoppard communicates his themes "by sheer 'rhetoric'"⁵² and suggests that "Stoppard has contrived a very sophisticated strategy for

the presentation of his ideas."⁵³ This strategy is, of course, Stoppard's incorporation of Hamlet into the "manifestly bizarre"⁵⁴ world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Corballis also finds inadequate the standard explanation of Stoppard's use of Hamlet--"Stoppard's play turns Shakespeare's inside out"⁵⁵ so that the bit-players, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, move to the center, usurping Prince Hamlet and pushing him to the periphery--for it "implies that Stoppard tinkered (albeit ingeniously) with an (or should I say the?) established dramatic masterpiece for no better reason than that 'it was there.'"⁵⁶

For Corballis, "the play is based upon a much more substantial foundation than this";⁵⁷ namely, "the inversion of the Hamlet action is merely a symptom of a thoroughgoing inversion of conventional assumptions about life."⁵⁸ Corballis essentially argues that, "as a result of 'the death of tragedy' in modern times, Hamlet had to be re-defined."⁵⁹ Stoppard redefines tragedy by juxtaposing the disorderly world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with the orderly world of Hamlet so that the modern couple is "portrayed as an extension of the audience and therefore as 'real' people"⁶⁰ while "the Hamlet characters . . . are made to appear all the more artificial, stagy, and 'un-real.'⁶¹ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern begin the play as spectators of Hamlet, but as they are gradually drawn into the script, the "fortuitous" gives way to the "ordained"

(Corballis borrows a line from Guildenstern here) as their random, Beckettian world is taken over by the Providential world of Hamlet, which "comes to symbolize the 'ordaining' power over which Stoppard's protagonists struggle to impose a measure of personal control."⁶²

Corballis explains that the Players work at first as a link "between the real world of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the audience and the artificial, stage-world of Hamlet,"⁶³ but "they make one decisive shift--late in Act 1--from the 'real' to the 'artificial'"⁶⁴ so that they serve "to develop the abstract antithesis between the world of Hamlet and the world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern into a dramatic confrontation full of fear and menace."⁶⁵ In Corballis's view, the contrast between these two worlds "constitutes the core of Stoppard's play,"⁶⁶ for the Hamlet "world (unlike the 'real' world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) has form and meaning; and death (which so perplexes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) is an accepted part of its design."⁶⁷

While Corballis's reading provides insight into the function of the Hamlet script, I am not comfortable with his classification of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as "real" (even though he calls the term into question by using quotation marks), for they seem every bit as stagy and artificial as the Hamlet characters, perhaps more so, since they are doubly derived from art (and thus emphatically removed from life), existing as the conflation of

Shakespeare's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon. The Renaissance world view underlying Hamlet seems, from the perspective offered by Rosencrantz, no more an artificial construct than the absurdist world view underlying Godot. Rather than endorsing the absurdist view as more real than the Renaissance view, Stoppard seems instead to juxtapose two equally artificial (or two equally "real," for that matter, since the distinction is no longer clear) modes of theater--without endorsing either--in order to undermine the concept of "realism." If we at first respond to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as "real" and to the Hamlet characters as artificial, it is, we begin to realize, because we have been taught since the mid 1950s to respond to absurdism as a valid representation of life, as more "realistic" than preceding theatrical modes. But once again, Stoppard's overt derivativeness intervenes to undermine any comfortable assumptions we might attempt to rest on, for the repeated attention given within the play to theater as only a set of conventions works with this juxtaposition of two incompatible dramatic modes to render the notion of "realism" untenable.

In his 1981 "Jumpers: Stoppard and the Theater of Exhaustion," Michael Hinden makes regrettably brief comments about Rosencrantz which support just such a reading. Like Corballis, he begins by disagreeing with the critical

view that Stoppard's derivativeness constitutes an artistic weakness: "Some critics have confused Tom Stoppard's use of earlier dramatic tradition (Shakespeare in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead and Wilde in Travesties) with parody, lack of originality, or want of purpose."⁶⁸ Unlike Wilcher and Corballis, though, Hinden's alternative context for reading Stoppard's borrowing is not the death of tragedy in the contemporary era, but John Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion," in which Barth puts forth the thesis that "the used-upness of certain forms" is "by no means necessarily a cause for despair" and should not be equated with "physical, moral, or intellectual decadence."⁶⁹ Hinden argues that "Like Barth, Stoppard finds himself in the predicament of having to succeed not only classical tradition (Shakespeare), but the newly defined (and therefore defunct) tradition of absurdism as well."⁷⁰ Hinden believes "Berlin misses the point"⁷¹ when he labels Rosencrantz "criticism, not literature"⁷² and describes the play "feeding on" its source plays. "Stoppard," he argues, "does not 'feed on' Shakespeare, Beckett, and Pirandello; he dines with them."⁷³ Hinden gives substance to this substitution of words by citing Barth's remark that "if Beethoven's Sixth were composed today, it would be an embarrassment; but clearly it wouldn't be, necessarily, if done with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are."⁷⁴ "By analogy," Hinden

continues, "Stoppard does not reinvent the world's most famous play so much as he encounters and subverts it."⁷⁵ With all due deference to the intentional fallacy, I think we can safely conclude that Stoppard did not intend to quietly pass off Hamlet as his own invention; he clearly uses the source play with an awareness "of where we've been and where we are." In Barth's view, such an informed use of the art of the past works to replenish art by confronting "an intellectual dead end" and turning it "against itself to accomplish new human work."⁷⁶

Thus, Hinden sees Stoppard's position in relation to the history of the theater as analogous to Barth's position in relation to the history of fiction. Just as Barth "ties himself self-consciously to Joyce and Beckett in repetition of the way Joyce tied himself consciously--but not self-consciously--to Homer,"⁷⁷ so Stoppard ties himself self-consciously to Shakespeare and Beckett in repetition, we ought to realize, of the way Shakespeare and Beckett tied themselves to the many sources they used in constructing Hamlet and Godot. Hinden goes on to describe how Rosencrantz "telescopes dramatic history, contrasting tragedy with theater of the absurd,"⁷⁸ duly noting the differences between the two theatrical modes which are highlighted by Stoppard's conflation of his two primary source plays. But his major contribution lies not so much in his discussion of the specific insights which emerge from Stoppard's juxtaposition

as in the Barth frame he provides for reading Stoppard's borrowing in general.

Post-modern aesthetic principles like Barth's provide a much more adequate frame for reading Stoppard's borrowing than either a Romantic aesthetic of originality in authorship (on which the vehement condemnations of Stoppard's "parasitism" are based) or a pre-Romantic aesthetic that sidesteps the originality question (on which the relatively non-judgemental source studies are based), for neither a Romantic nor a pre-Romantic aesthetic can account for the implications of Stoppard's overt derivativeness. Critics locked into a Romantic conception of originality in authorship fail to recognize that Stoppard's authorial strategy directly challenges the aesthetic of originality, and as a result, they produce little more than wholesale condemnations of Rosencrantz. While commentators working from pre-Romantic assumptions generally produce more insightful studies, they too fall short of the mark. Stoppard's borrowing cannot simply be treated in the same way as Chaucer's or Shakespeare's, for in the contemporary era, when the popular view of authorship is still very much in tune with early nineteenth century Romantic ideals, borrowing, especially borrowing as blatant as Stoppard's, means something very different than it did in the days of yore before critics embraced the creative genius of the Author as a central aesthetic tenet. In short, critics, as much

as authors, must work from an awareness "of where we've been and where we are." And where we are is limbo--caught between a play that demands an awareness of contemporary critical theory, and an applied criticism that is still stuck where we have been, still stuck with outdated critical assumptions that render it unable to account for a play like Rosencrantz.

Rosencrantz offers us a fun-filled ride out of limbo land, and it will escort us safely to the shores of a revised aesthetic theory if only we will hop aboard and leave our heavy, outdated critical baggage behind. Stoppard does not just abruptly confront us with his blatant, jarring, "dislocating" derivativeness and leave us empty-handed, unable to reconcile our old ideas about art with this play that so outrageously flies in the face of those ideas. Instead, he fills his play with dialogue and situations which guide us toward a series of insights about the nature of the theater. As we watch Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle with their lessons about the theater, we join them in pondering the nature of representation, fate, and dramatic structure. Berlin was at least partially correct in calling Rosencrantz Theater of Criticism, for the play does in fact function as criticism, prodding us, as so much contemporary critical theory does, to revise our notions of "originality" and "realism." But it also works as theater. And this may be Stoppard's greatest achievement--while he

teaches us that theater is a self-contained set of conventions with nothing behind or beneath it, no god-like Author working in collaboration with Providence, no special relationship with life, he also shows us that we can, as Guildenstern advises, still "Enjoy it. Relax" (p. 40). Theater has never needed God to provide fate, life to provide "realism"; it has always been a set of conventions, complete unto itself, always a matter of "playing at [.] . . words, words" (p. 41).

We feel no sense of loss at being asked to abandon our old notions about art because while Stoppard is undermining "realism" and "originality," he is simultaneously reassuring us that theater still works perfectly well without these aesthetic assumptions, reassuring us that we can give up these old notions without sacrificing one iota of the joy we have always found in the theater. Stoppard gives us a play that not only defies "realism" and "originality," but is also about death--the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the death of tragedy, the death of old assumptions about representation. All these gloomy ingredients, however, do not add up to a gloomy play, for Rosencrantz is decidedly a joy--and a large measure of the joyful playfulness that pervades it is made possible by the loosening of the constraints imposed by old aesthetic rules. The deaths of tragedy, representation, "originality," and "realism" are, to borrow Barth's phrase, "by no

means necessarily a cause for despair."⁷⁹ In Rosencrantz, Stoppard taps the potential of these deaths, demonstrating that they make room for new life--and that the room is bigger, for the limits of theater have been extended.

In Act One, Guildenstern comments, "The only beginning is birth and the only end is death--if you can't count on that, what can you count on?" (p. 39). In Rosencrantz, you cannot count on either, for neither the beginning nor the end of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a simple, single point. In "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes argues that "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."⁸⁰ While Barthes is describing a contemporary theoretical view of writing in general, no play has ever more vividly manifested this description than Rosencrantz. And the consequences of this blatant blending and clashing could hardly be more far-reaching for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and for us.

At the beginning of the play, they are most concerned with their own beginnings, and they try repeatedly, though unsuccessfully, to determine where they came from. Eventually, as the play progresses and the "fortuitous" gives way to the "ordained"--the randomness and stagnation symbolized by the coin toss give way to the outcome ordained by the script of Hamlet--the question of their origins becomes

moot, and they become ever more concerned with determining their end. The blending and clashing of writings confounds their search for their end even more profoundly than it does their search for origins. And when death finally comes to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, it raises more questions than it answers, leaving us to carry on the search for an explanation in their absence. Is this death as it was written in Hamlet? If so, were the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ever part of tragedy's Grand Design, even in Hamlet? Or were their deaths required in Shakespeare's play merely to tie up a loose end? Or is this death according to Godot, pointedly absurd? Or is this death, as John Perlette argues, according to Freud, "death" which demonstrates our psychological inability to believe that we cease to exist, even as spectators?⁸¹ Or is this death by magic trick--"Now you see me, now you--(and disappears)" (p. 126).

It is death by all of these, death as "It is written" (p. 80), in a variety of styles that blend and clash endlessly, with no origin in a single Author-Father-God and, as Barthes argues, therefore no end. "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."⁸² Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's inability to find their origins and ends points to the generalized lack of origins and ends in the entire play. Stoppard and Barthes, however, both encourage

us to think, not in terms of a lack of origins and ends, but in terms of a freedom from the limits formerly imposed on the text by the Author-Father-God. By declining to pose as the Author, Stoppard frees himself from the constraints of feigning "originality." He is no longer compelled to cover the tracks of his borrowing in an effort to pass Rosencrantz off as an unmediated representation of reality. Nor is he compelled to give us the Truth, the final answer, the single 'theological' meaning in the form of an endorsement of one mode of theater at the expense of all the others. If Rosencrantz offers us any truth, it is that theater never depended on Truth. Rosencrantz does not rely on the truth of the tragic vision--"There's a divinity that shapes our ends"⁸³--any more than it relies on the Truth of the absurdist vision--there is no divinity shaping any aspect of life--or on the Truth of the Freudian or even of the magic trick vision.

The text does not offer us Truth, which inherently requires closure. It offers play--an endless play of styles of writing. The text becomes, as Guildenstern explains, "a prize, an extra slice of childhood when you least expect it, as a prize for being good, or a compensation for never having had one . . ." (p. 40). The play is clearly a prize for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, for they get to play--title roles this time, not bit parts as they did in Hamlet. And when they are not futilely searching for their

untraceable origins or their inscrutable ends, they are very often playing--playing games, role-playing. Egan believes Rosencrantz's "truest debt to Waiting for Godot"⁸⁴ lies not in a shared absurdist vision, but in a more full realization of the potential of play suggested by Godot. "One of the few consolations Didi and Gogo have in their limbo state, besides the uncertain pleasure of one another's company, is their sporadic ability to improvise games, thereby endowing their existence with an artificial sense of form and meaning,"⁸⁵ he observes. In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, the tenuous and wry note of hope represented by this sense of play becomes a major chord and a dramatized philosophy.⁸⁶

The major chord of hope stemming from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's ability to sustain play--Stoppard's ability to sustain play--in the absence of Truth, "realism," and "originality" (ingredients formerly thought necessary to make a play work) turns Rosencrantz into a prize for us as well. After all the focus on what we have lost in the twentieth century--we have lost God, lost order, lost meaning, suffered a crisis of cultural authority--Rosencrantz moves beyond the gloom of expounding our losses and demonstrates what we have gained. Without the limits imposed by Truth, theater is no longer restricted to endorsing a single theatrical mode at the expense of all others. To put it another way, theater is no longer restricted to

representing "life" and, in doing so, reinforcing a single world view. We recall Craig Owens's distinction between modernism--the era of master narratives--and post-modernism--the era when master narratives have lost their credibility, when we have developed a healthy skepticism of attempts to provide the single theoretical discourse. Stoppard fosters this healthy postmodern scepticism by refusing to endorse a single theatrical discourse. Rather than embarking on a therapeutic program for recuperating "the tremendous loss of mastery"⁸⁷ characteristic of our era, Stoppard warmly embraces the loss of mastery, treating it not so much as a loss, but as an opening, an opportunity for extending the limits of what theater can do.

To signal the extension of the limits of theater, Rosencrantz opens with a coin toss which Stoppard describes as "impossible" (p. 11), and the Players make their final appearance, moments before the play's end, by emerging "impossibly" (p. 122) from a barrel. The impossible opening situation, in sharp contrast to the impossible barrel trick near the play's end, provokes a lengthy consideration of the nature of reality and order. Guildenstern's first sustained response to the bizarre run of heads clearly indicates that his faith in the order of reality has been shaken: "A weaker man might be moved to re-examine his faith, if in nothing else at least in the law of probability" (p. 12). As still more coins consistently turn

up heads, Guildenstern grows ever more aware of the unsettling implications and seeks an explanation, sensing that the lop-sided coin toss "must be indicative of something" (p. 16). While the appearance of the ghost at the beginning of Hamlet indicates only that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark, the "impossible" coin toss at the beginning of Rosencrantz reaches beyond mere plot implications to indicate that the order of theater is separate and distinct from the order of reality.

Guildenstern, however, does not immediately grasp these broad implications. He first tries a variety of explanations to account for the impossible run of heads in terms of reality as he has known it. He suggests that perhaps he is willing it, that time has stopped dead, that the divine has intervened, or that maybe the bizarre results are "a spectacular vindication of the principle that each individual coin spun individually (he spins one) is as likely to come down heads as tails and therefore should cause no surprise each individual time it does" (p. 16). When the ninety-second coin he has just spun turns up heads as well, he tries a trio of syllogisms which serve more to undermine the whole concept of logic than to explain the coin toss in terms of reality.

The failed syllogisms drive him to continue "with tight hysteria, under control" (p. 17) with one last attempt to contrive a realistic explanation of the impossible coin toss

before the approach of the Players prompts him to take a different tack. "The equanimity of your average tosser of coin depends upon a law, or rather a tendency, or let us say a mathematically calculable chance," Guildenstern explains, "which ensures that he will not upset himself by losing too much nor upset his opponent by winning too often" (p. 18). Desperately searching for a realistic explanation of this event which has shaken his faith in the order of reality, Guildenstern begins by referring to the "law" which kept the world in balance. But he quickly reduces that binding certainty to a "tendency," then a "probability" before finally settling on "chance" as the principle of order.

In accounting for his indebtedness to Beckett, Stoppard told Ronald Hayman that "the Beckett novels show as much as the plays" in Rosencrantz "because there's a Beckett joke which is the funniest joke in the world to me."⁸⁸ The joke, he continued, "consists of a confident statement followed by immediate refutation by the same voice. It's a constant process of elaborate structure and sudden--and total--dismantlement."⁸⁹ Guildenstern's lengthy speech is clearly built on the Beckett joke--a confident statement about the order of reality, followed by refutations that dismantle the whole structure he has just built.

Rosencrantz, who has not been at all disturbed by the implications of winning ninety-two coins in a row, responds

to Guildenstern's elaborate discourse with a typically inappropriate comment: "Another curious scientific phenomenon is the fact that the fingernails grow after death, as does the beard" (p. 18). Lightly dropped, apparently without significance, this inappropriate remark unobtrusively introduces the topic which will gradually grow into an obsession--death. But Guildenstern is not yet interested in their end. "Tensed up by [Rosencrantz's] rambling" (p. 19), he tries to redirect their discussion to an issue which seems to him more appropriate at this early stage--their beginning. "Do you remember the first thing that happened today?" (p. 19), he asks. They connect again as Rosencrantz recalls "that man, a foreigner" (p. 19)--a messenger from Hamlet--"we were sent for" (p. 19). "That's why we're here" (p. 19), he asserts triumphantly, as though certainty has suddenly been restored. Of course, it has not, for they do not even know where they are, except as Rosencrantz lamely explains, "Travelling" (p. 19). Guildenstern's suggestion that "We better get on" (p. 20) takes them all the way to the footlights, where Rosencrantz asks, "Which way do we-- (He turns round.) Which way did we--?" (p. 20).

They are temporarily saved from fruitless contemplation of where they came from by the sound of a band which signals the approach of the six Tragedians. Rosencrantz responds to the music, which is not yet audible to those of us in the audience, by flatly stating, "It couldn't be

real" (p. 20). In a way, of course, he is right--the Tragedians are always "on," "always in character" (p. 34), always in a play, and thus never in reality. Before they arrive, though, Guildenstern proposes another explanation of their situation to Rosencrantz which shares a rhetorical similarity with his second syllogism but marks a departure from his previous attempts to reconcile the impossible coin toss with "reality." When Guildenstern was still trying to account realistically for the coin toss, he instructed Rosencrantz to "Discuss" (p. 17) a syllogism centered on the operation of probability in "un-, sub- or supernatural forces" (p. 17). Now, as illusion is about to intrude in the form of a troupe of actors, he instructs Rosencrantz to "demolish" (p. 20) the following proposition: "'The colours red, blue and green are real. The colour yellow is a mystical experience shared by everybody'" (p. 20).

Rosencrantz does not demolish this proposition any more than he discussed the syllogism, so Guildenstern further explores the nature of reality and illusion with an expanded story about "a man breaking his journey between one place and another at a third place of no name, character, population, or significance" (p. 21)--an apt synopsis of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's situation--who "sees a unicorn cross his path and disappear" (p. 21). A second, third, and fourth man report the same sight, "and the more witnesses there are the thinner it gets and the more

reasonable it becomes until it is as thin as reality" (p. 21). The mystical encounter with the unicorn is by degrees robbed of its magic until it is explained away as "a horse with an arrow in its forehead" (p. 21).

Unable to reconcile the impossible coin toss with "reality," Guildenstern embraces illusion as an equally plausible way of interpreting events. Why not unicorns? Stoppard asks us through Guildenstern. Why stubbornly adhere to the limits imposed by "realism" when the difference between reality and illusion is on the whole rather arbitrary--why should yellow be mystical and red real?--and a matter of collective consent, not some distinction based concretely on authentic divisions in the world? The unicorn tale's disappointed "thin as reality" assessment indicates that the usual privileging of reality over illusion has been turned on its head, for the case of the unicorn at least, believing in illusion offers a more interesting way of perceiving the world. The point of Guildenstern's unicorn tale is lost on Rosencrantz, but it is not lost on those of us in the audience. Theater itself is a kind of unicorn, Stoppard is showing us, but it is better than a unicorn because it does not lose its magic when seen by multiple witnesses. Theater, like unicorns, depends on "a choice of persuasions" (p. 21)--we can choose to believe in its magic, or we can explain it away in realistic terms as "a horse with an arrow in its forehead" (p. 21).

Guildenstern's last wistful comment on the topic-- "I'm sorry it wasn't a unicorn. It would have been nice to have unicorns" (p. 21)--provides the vocal accompaniment for the musical arrival of the six Tragedians. In a way, Guildenstern misreads the Players, for they are unicorns, at least in some limited sense, for, as Egan argues, "despite their sorry condition, the Player and his troupe are that very hint of magic for which Guildenstern has been looking."⁹⁰ But while the Players may share the unicorn's magic, they prove a bitter disappointment to Guildenstern on other levels. "He has hoped for an omen, such as the hero of a romance might receive at the outset of his quest,"⁹¹ Egan observes. Instead of an immortal unicorn replete with associations of virginity, Guildenstern finds "a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes" (p. 27) whose forte is the performance of death. "I can do you blood and love without the rhetoric, and I can do you blood and rhetoric without the love [. . .] but I can't do you love and rhetoric without the blood. Blood is compulsory-- they're all blood" (p. 33), the Player explains.

Reality may be unfathomable for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but illusion is no calm, safe harbor either, for the illusion Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are just about to get caught up in ends in death every time. And when the Hamlet script intrudes moments after the Player's "Blood is compulsory" speech, it serves to underscore the

Player's explanation of fate: "We have no control" (p. 25). Like the Players, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are characters in a script over which they have no control, but Stoppard emphasizes their lack of control even in Hamlet by incorporating Act Two, scene two into Rosencrantz. After Claudius instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to draw Hamlet "on to pleasures" (p. 36) and thereby glean what afflicts him, "They both bow" (p. 36) and respond with metrically identical speeches emphasizing their powerlessness to refuse the will of the King and Queen:

Rosencrantz: Both your majesties
Might, by the sovereign power you
have of us,
Put your dread pleasures more into
command
Than to entreaty.

Guildenstern: But we both obey,
And here give up ourselves in the
full bent
To lay our service freely at your feet,
To be commanded. (p. 36)

Their twin speeches, however, belie the real differences in their responses to the intrusion of the Hamlet script, for while Guildenstern seems sincere in giving himself freely "To be commanded" (p. 36), Rosencrantz immediately proclaims that he wants no part in this new script: "I want to go home" (p. 37). Guildenstern, who was very concerned about the randomness of the coin toss, finds the certainty of the Renaissance play comforting, but Rosencrantz, who was never disturbed by the randomness of their

initial situation, somehow senses, amidst great confusion, the ultimate implications of accepting the roles offered by the King and Queen: "I tell you it's all stopping to a death, it's boding to a depth, stepping to a head, it's all heading to a dead stop--" (p. 38).

Thus, Guildenstern now plays the soothing "nursemaid" (p. 38) as Rosencrantz panics about the growing number of questions and the diminishing number of satisfactory answers, reversing the roles they played when the script was random and Guildenstern was the one in a panic. When Rosencrantz complains, "I remember when there were no questions" (p. 38), Guildenstern disagrees: "There were always questions. To exchange one set for another is no great matter" (p. 38). For Guildenstern, though not for Rosencrantz, the opening random script raised a multitude of questions about the nature of reality. In exchanging one theatrical mode for another, they merely swap sets of questions--"no great matter," according to Guildenstern.

Rosencrantz, though, does not like all this interchangeability--the interchangeability of their names, their roles, the scripts. He wants to know, once and for all, who he is, Rosencrantz or Guildenstern. "I don't care one way or another," he tells Guildenstern, "so why don't you make up your mind" (p. 38). "We can't afford anything quite so arbitrary," Guildenstern replies, not wanting to risk falling back into the pointed arbitrariness from which they

have just been saved by the ordered Renaissance script.

"Nor did we come all this way for a christening. All that--preceded us" (p. 39). Guildenstern's remarks indicate that he is beginning to grasp the potential significance of the script for them. Certainly, the "christening" preceded them, for Shakespeare named them long before. As Guildenstern tries to explain to Rosencrantz, they would be in a much more uncertain predicament were it not for the author who named them: "We are comparatively fortunate," he argues. "We might have been left to sift the whole field of human nomenclature, like two blind men looting a bazaar for their own portraits . . ." (p. 39). While they may still be uncertain of which one is Rosencrantz and which Guildenstern, the roles offered by the new script narrow their options from "the whole field of human nomenclature" to just two names: "At least we are given alternatives" (p. 39), Guildenstern explains. "But," and here is the rub, "not choice" (p. 39), he quickly adds.

As the attributes of fate begin to accrue to the script, Rosencrantz by steps reveals that God does not control fate as much as the author controls the script, for in this play, destiny is defined and choice is limited, not by the fate ordained by God, but by the script written by the author. The blending and clashing of theatrical modes undermines the Truth value of both the random, Beckettian initial mode and the ordered Renaissance mode

which intrudes. For Guildenstern, it is "a choice of persuasions" (p. 21), one set of questions or another. But as Rosencrantz indicates with his "anguished cry," "Consistency is all I ask!" (p. 39), the blending and clashing of modes is as unsettling for him as the impossible coin toss was for Guildenstern. Unmoved, Guildenstern answers Rosencrantz's anguished cry with the first of many scrambled versions of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily mask" (p. 39). What was in times past (when God controlled the fate of characters) a prayer to God for bread to sustain life now becomes a prayer to the author of the script for a role--a mask--to sustain play.

Rosencrantz, however, still wants "to go home" (p. 39). What he does not realize is that, as Wilcher observes, "Characters, in the Pirandello sense, have no being and no 'home' but the text and the stage; when they are not on stage, speaking the lines written for them, then they cease to exist."⁹² Although Stoppard will illustrate this abstract point more fully after Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have had another encounter with Hamlet, he suggests it fleetingly here with Rosencrantz's repetition of the question, "Which way did we come in?" (p. 39). The pair will never answer that question and will never be able to find the "home" Rosencrantz seeks. To get there, they will have to redefine "home" as the text and the stage.

Guildenstern, who feels more at home with the new text, tries to encourage just such a redefinition as he delivers perhaps the most beautiful speech in the entire play, a speech directed as much to us in the audience as to Rosencrantz, for most of us likely share Rosencrantz's apprehension about the blatant blending and clashing of theatrical modes. "We'll be all right" (p. 40), Guildenstern assures Rosencrantz and us. Rosencrantz, still skeptical of the script, vaguely sensing what we already know to be true about the ultimate end of Hamlet, asks, "For how long?" (p. 40). "Till events have played themselves out" (p. 40), Guildenstern convincingly answers. "There's a logic at work--it's all done for you, don't worry. Enjoy it. Relax" (p. 40). In any play, characters are only all right until events have played themselves out, only all right as long as the script lasts.

Besides, Guildenstern continues, the script is in itself a kind of prize, a chance to play: "To be taken in hand and led, like being a child again, even without the innocence, a child--it's like being given a prize, an extra slice of childhood when you least expect it, as a prize for being good, or compensation for never having had one . . ." (p. 40). We in the audience should relax and be taken in hand, for though we have lost our innocence--we know what happens to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the end of Hamlet and we are being shown the error of our naive

assumptions about "originality," "realism," and Truth in the theater--this loss of innocence need not stop play. And for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the play is decidedly a prize, an answer to Guildenstern's prayer for a mask, for Rosencrantz gives them new roles to play, starring roles this time. Even though the outcome will be the same-- Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will still be dead--the chance to play their roles again is a prize all the same, compensation either for being good or for never having had a childhood (they were "born" as adults in both Hamlet and Godot, after all). By reusing an old (con)text, Stoppard has, in effect, given them new "life" as characters.

Guildenstern follows this speech by declaring, "It's a game" (p. 40), and indeed, after some pointed allusions to Hamlet and Godot--Guildenstern tells Rosencrantz he is playing at "words, words" (p. 41), echoing both Hamlet⁹³ and Vladimir,⁹⁴ and Rosencrantz describes the business of being a spectator as "appalling" (p. 41), recalling Vladimir's ". . . appalled. (With emphasis.) AP-PALLED"⁹⁵-- they engage in the most sustained period of playing in Rosencrantz. First, they pursue Rosencrantz's suggestion to "play at questions" (p. 42), a most appropriate activity since they have had no luck with answers. The question game, which is won by always answering each question with another question, is intended to serve as practice for their match with Hamlet, the idea being that they will ask

questions to glean what afflicts the Prince without giving away any information about themselves in the process.

Helene Keyssar-Franke, observing that in this game, "one loses when one answers a question,"⁹⁶ argues that "the sense conveyed is that an answer is a box, an enclosure which stops action and creates the death of the speaker; questions are vital, freeing; answers are dead and enslaving."⁹⁷ What is true for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, she suggests, "is also true for the audience."⁹⁸ Although Keyssar-Franke is intent primarily upon illustrating the appearance of free will in the actions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, her comments about the vitality of endless questions and the enslaving nature of final answers ring true as a statement about the general strategy of the play. While audiences may initially share Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's sense of dislocation about the lack of final answers, the lack of a fixed theatrical mode corresponding to a fixed world view, both the content and the open-ended structure of the play push toward a revision of the preference for a clear-cut origin and a final message in art. Rosencrantz encourages us to replace the old aesthetic model of a god-like Author providing both the single origin and the final answer with a model which recognizes neither origins nor ends, but which celebrates instead endless play--play of questions, play of styles, play of "words, words."

Interestingly, the actual questions of the question game also point to the death of the old aesthetic, for God, upon whose existence the old aesthetic ultimately depends, is first mentioned by name in the question game. When Guildenstern poses the question "What in God's name is going on?" (p. 42), Rosencrantz declares "Foul! No rhetoric" (p. 42). Similarly, when Guildenstern responds to Rosencrantz's "Is there a choice?" (p. 43) with "Is there a God?" (p. 43), Rosencrantz again declares a foul on the grounds that the game allows "No non sequiturs" (p. 43). God has been rendered irrelevant to choice, mere rhetoric, underscoring the idea that the fate of characters lies not in God's hands, where traditional assumptions placed it, but in the hands of the author. The game winds down with Rosencrantz's asking a question which will become the central question as the play continues, "Where's it going to end?" (p. 44), to which Guildenstern replies with the statement, "That's the question" (p. 44). Rosencrantz aptly sums up the general situation with his lament, "It's all questions" (p. 44).

As they reach a new dead-end, Hamlet wanders on stage briefly, providing a new impetus for dialogue. His appearance first prompts them to return to their earlier preoccupation with determining their names, a pursuit that offers some initial success--just by randomly guessing, they are right half the time--but no sustained certainty. When

Rosencrantz answers to the name of Guildenstern, Guildenstern is "disgusted" (p. 45) and exclaims, "Consistency is all I ask!" (p. 45), taking over Rosencrantz's earlier line. Then, just as they are about to engage in another extended game, Rosencrantz quietly states, "Immortality is all I seek . . ." (p. 45). Guildenstern's rhymed response is another version of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily week . . ." (p. 45), which is, in effect, a reiteration of Rosencrantz's call for immortality, a prayer for a week for each day they are allotted. These requests for immortality are strategically placed in the midst of their most obvious, extended playing, illustrating the inverse of Wilcher's observation that "when they are not on stage, speaking the lines written for them, . . . they cease to exist."⁹⁹ As long as they are on stage, speaking their lines, they continue to exist--play gives them, if not immortality, at least remarkable longevity.

And play they do. For the first of many times in Rosencrantz, they engage in role-playing, an activity with overt metadramatic implications. Guildenstern suggests that he play Hamlet and that Rosencrantz question him, again with the intent of practicing for the upcoming match with Hamlet. The immediate effect is greater confusion, since there are now three roles instead of just two, and Rosencrantz cannot figure out who he is supposed to play, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, or Hamlet. Once the verbal slapstick stemming from

this identity confusion subsides, the role-playing yields an admirable explanation of what afflicts Hamlet: "Your father, whom you love, dies, you are his heir, you come back to find that hardly was the corpse cold before his young brother popped onto his throne and into his sheets, thereby offending both legal and natural practice" (p. 51), Rosencrantz summarizes. "Now why exactly are you behaving in this extraordinary manner?" (p. 51), he asks. The humor of this scene arises at least in part from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's ability to somehow arrive, amidst great fumbling and bumbling, at what seems a better explanation of Hamlet's behavior than did T.S. Eliot in his well-known and very serious "Hamlet and His Problems." Rosencrantz's explanation undermines Eliot's declaration that Hamlet "is most certainly an artistic failure"¹⁰⁰. because "Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is . . . in excess of the facts as they appear."¹⁰¹ If Rosencrantz, whose strengths do not include a keen intellect, can account for Hamlet's behavior in terms of the facts as they appear, the facts cannot be nearly as obscure as Eliot claims.

This amusing scene of rare, triumphant insight degenerates rapidly into confusion as Rosencrantz once again hears the sounds of a band. But this time, his announcement heralds the second appearance of Hamlet, not the Players, and their long-awaited match with Hamlet finally comes in the form of the latter part of Act Two, scene two of

Shakespeare's play. Stoppard chooses this moment for his act break. By placing a blackout in the middle of the scene, he is able to omit the incriminating dialogue between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Hamlet in which the pair admit to having been sent for by the King and Queen. The effect of this altered presentation, of course, is to foster audience sympathy for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by furthering the impression that they are helpless victims with no control over their destinies, or even much understanding of their situation, rather than willing conspirators in the plot of Claudius and Gertrude. When we do hear of the exchange, it is through Rosencrantz's dismal assessment of the game they have practiced for so extensively. He declares the match "twenty-seven--three" (p. 57) in Hamlet's favor. The script has become a game for Rosencrantz as well as for Guildenstern, but Rosencrantz sees it as a losing game. "He murdered us" (p. 57), he complains after the match with Hamlet, not yet fully aware of how prophetic his words are.

The intrusion of the Hamlet script also prompts the pair to return to a question twice raised by Rosencrantz, "Which way did we come in?" (p. 58). In contrast to the last two times Rosencrantz posed this question, this time Guildenstern pursues it, hoping that by determining direction, they will gain some insight into Hamlet's madness since the Prince claims he can "tell a hawk from a handsaw"

(p. 57), but only "when the wind is southerly" (p. 57). As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to determine which direction is south, they find themselves unable to do so in the absence of any fixed point of reference. All the old ways of determining direction, the position of the sun in relation to the time of day, for example, fail for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They cannot work from the known to determine the unknown since the information that would provide their starting point is itself shrouded in mystery. Unable to determine whether or not it is morning or which way they came in, they turn in confusion to establishing the direction of the wind. Invoking the old theater joke that stages are notoriously drafty places, Rosencrantz observes, "There isn't any wind. Draught, yes" (p. 59). Guildenstern suggests a method for proceeding: "In that case, the origin. Trace it to its source and it might give us a rough idea of the way we came in--which might give us a rough idea of south, for further reference" (p. 59, *italics mine*).

This idea immediately fails since the draft comes "through the floor" (p. 59) and "that's not a direction" (p. 59), but their inability to find the source or origin is more significant as a symptom of the generalized lack of sources and origins in the play as a whole. God has traditionally served as the ultimate source or origin, as well as the end, of everything in the universe--the "Alpha

and the Omega, the beginning and the ending."¹⁰² But He has been declared irrelevant, mere rhetoric. The other traditional source or origin in literature--the Author, who has conventionally been seen as the creating God of his fictive universe--is not operating either, at least not in the traditional, conventional sense, for Stoppard does not pretend to be the ex nihilo creator of the fictive world of Rosencrantz. The source of this script is not One, but many, not one god-like Author, but many already existing writings that are fused together in a new writing. In place of a simple starting point from which they could determine the one known to discover many unknowns, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern encounter layers of unknowns that slip and slide infinitely without ever yielding a fixed source.

Again finding reality unfathomable, Guildenstern "sits" (p. 60) and returns to pondering the benefits of embracing illusion instead. Echoing his earlier tale of the unicorn, he tells a story about "a Chinaman of the T'ang Dynasty-- and, by which definition, a philosopher--[who] dreamed he was a butterfly" (p. 60). "From that moment," Guildenstern continues, "he was never quite sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a Chinese philosopher" (p. 60). Unlike the unicorn tale, this story ends in an explicitly stated moral: "Envy him; in his two-fold security" (p. 60). The Chinaman never loses his illusion, perhaps because, unlike the man who saw the unicorn, he does not share his

private illusion with anyone. But the illusion of the theater can never be private: it must necessarily be shared between players and audience.

This is exactly the point that the Player histrionically makes when he enters the stage again momentarily. Protesting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's departure in the midst of his troupe's performance of number "thirty-eight" (p. 63), the Player "bursts out," "You don't understand the humiliation of it--to be tricked out of the single assumption which makes our existence viable--that somebody is watching . . ." (p. 63). He carries on, very dramatically, "We pledged our identities, secure in the conventions of our trade, that someone would be watching" (p. 64). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have violated the covenant between actors and audience on which theater is based: actors play and the audience gives meaning to the play by watching and playing along. As the Player's protests make clear, the illusion of the theater depends only on the audience and actors playing their roles according to accepted conventions; it has nothing to do with an accurate representation of life. "There we were," the Player explains, "demented children mincing about in clothes that no one ever wore, speaking as no man ever spoke, swearing love in wigs and rhymed couplets, killing each other with wooden swords" (p. 63, italics mine).

No, art does not mirror life, the Player teaches in this, his first lesson to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and to the audience. It is a self-contained set of conventions which requires that the audience share in the illusion. The Player has usurped Guildenstern's role as the spokesperson for the possibilities of illusion. In his Chinaman story, which, not coincidentally, is his last story espousing the virtues of embracing illusion, Guildenstern revealed a serious flaw in his understanding of the way illusion works, for theater must be a shared illusion. From now on, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will be unwilling and contentious students of the Player. They will resist his explanations of the conventions of theater and cling stubbornly to an old aesthetic model based on "realism" and Truth. The more they insist upon these outdated assumptions, the less sense they will be able to make of the script as it unfolds, and the weaker their position will become vis-à-vis the Player.

They resist even this first lesson, which Guildenstern responds to by clapping "solo with slow measured irony" (p. 44) and critiquing the Player's overly dramatic monologue: "Brilliantly recreated--if these eyes could weep! . . . Rather strong on metaphor, mind you. No criticism--only a matter of taste" (p. 64). Similarly, Guildenstern reveals his resistance by responding to the Player's announcement that their performance that evening will be "about a King and Queen . . ." (p. 65) by dismissing it as "Escapism!"

(p. 65), even though the script Guildenstern is himself caught up in is also about a King and Queen. As Guildenstern vies with the Player for the upper-hand, the Player gets tough and delivers a series of lines pointing to his superiority. In contrast to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the Player "can come and go as [he] please[s]" (p. 66). When Guildenstern admits, "We're still finding our feet" (p. 66), the Player scores another point by advising, "I should concentrate on not losing your heads" (p. 66). Then, the Player pushes the moment to its crisis by declaring, "And I know which way the wind is blowing" (p. 66).

This unnerving comment rattles Guildenstern, who first tries to retaliate by insulting the Player as a man of the theater: "Operating on two levels, are we?! How clever! I expect it comes naturally to you, being in the business so to speak" (p. 66). The Player knows that he has the upper-hand now and that he does not have to take these insults. As he "makes to go off again" (p. 66), and in doing so demonstrates his own freedom of movement, Guildenstern breaks down and concedes victory to the Player, at least for the moment. He admits to their pitiful plight: "The truth is, we value your company, for want of any other. We have been left so much to our own devices--after a while one welcomes the uncertainty of being left to other people's" (p. 66). Unmoved, the Player pronounces a truth which has been apparent since the play's opening: "Uncertainty is the

normal state. You're nobody special" (p. 66). As the Player "makes to leave again" (p. 66), Guildenstern drops all pretenses of superiority and adopts the role of a student questioning the master: "But for God's sake what are we supposed to do?!" (p. 66). The Player returns advice that Guildenstern, in a calmer moment of accepting the script as written, had given Rosencrantz: "Relax. Respond. That's what people do. You can't go through life questioning your situation at every turn" (p. 66). Guildenstern again reveals that he has regressed to old aesthetic assumptions when he complains, "We don't know how to act" (p. 66), because they have been told so little, "and for all we know it isn't even true" (p. 66). Guildenstern, who had once taught Rosencrantz that Truth was merely "a choice of persuasions" (p. 21), now gets his own lesson returned.

The Player tells him,

For all anyone knows nothing is. Everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living. There may be nothing behind it, but it doesn't make any difference so long as it is honoured. One acts on assumptions. (p. 67)

Truth is like the theater, the Player might add. There may be nothing behind it--no god-like Author carrying out a Providential plan, no special relationship with reality--but as long as the conventions are honored, as long as both actors and audience play their roles, the illusion works. For that matter, Guildenstern might realize, Truth is like

"reality"; as long as everyone honors the color red as real, it functions like a real color. There may not be, indeed may never have been, anything behind Truth, reality, or illusion, but this is, as Barth says, "by no means necessarily a cause for despair."¹⁰³ Although the Player knows that there may be nothing behind all his playing, he and his troupe keep right on playing roles: "We learn something every day, to our cost" (p. 115), he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern later. "But we troupers just go on and on. Do you know what happens to old actors?" (p. 115), he asks. "Nothing. They're still acting" (p. 115), is his punch line. Guildenstern, who had earlier prayed for a mask to sustain play, ought to know that play is like questions-- "vital, freeing,"¹⁰⁴ as Keyssar-Franke explains. Ultimate answers, which depend on Truth, are a box which stops play and "creates the death of the speaker."¹⁰⁵

In insisting upon Truth as a precondition for play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become counter-examples for the audience, examples which illustrate the unfortunate consequences of clinging to an outdated aesthetic model in the face of a script that denies such a model. Before their second meeting with the Tragedians, they had engaged in extended play--play with coins, play with the Players, play with questions, play with roles. After resisting the Player's lesson and insisting upon Truth, though, they very pointedly lose their ability to play. In rapid succession,

their games fail. First, Rosencrantz shouts "Next!" (p. 69) into the wings, but no one comes. Then he refers to the coin they were tossing--"You remember that coin?" (p. 69), he asks--but notes, "I think I lost it" (p. 70).

With no one and nothing to play with, Rosencrantz imagines himself in the box Keyssar-Franke refers to. "Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, lying in a box with a lid on it?" (p. 70), he asks. Throughout the play, Rosencrantz typically merely responds--"I can't think of anything original. I'm only good in support" (p. 104), he explains when Guildenstern complains, "You just repeat [everything] in a different order" (p. 104)--and his responses are usually limited to one or two lines. For once, though, he takes the initiative and delivers a twenty-one line monologue on being dead--or alive--in a box. He begins, "It's silly to be depressed by it. I mean one thinks of it as being alive in a box, one keeps forgetting to take into account the fact that one is dead" (p. 70). He "blunders on in a series of mutually self-cancelling statements"¹⁰⁶ which, as Perlette argues, indicate that death is for Rosencrantz (and for all of us, according to Freud) "an entirely unattainable thought, a literally unthinkable thought, imaginatively considered."¹⁰⁷

Rosencrantz's box speech marks the beginning of the growing obsession with death. Before, death was mentioned only fleetingly, but after this sustained speech, it will

become the central issue of the play--it will be discussed and performed in a variety of theatrical modes until Stoppard has turned the one certainty of life into a series of open-ended questions which subsume the other open-ended questions raised by the play.

Rosencrantz comes out of his box reverie only to enter another box, actually a continuation of the box he was already in--the box which stops play. After failing to summon anyone to play with and losing their coin, Rosencrantz attempts to tell several stories that sound at first like Guildenstern's unicorn and Chinaman parables in praise of illusion. Sadly, all these stories fail. The first one, about an early Christian meeting Saul of Tarsus in Heaven, ends with a lame punch line whose pointlessness prompts Rosencrantz to exclaim, "They don't care. We count for nothing. We could remain silent until we're green in the face, they wouldn't come" (p. 71). Guildenstern picks up only the mention of green and responds, "Blue, red" (p. 71), recalling his first venture into the nature of reality and illusion, but mentioning, significantly, only the real colors and not the mystical color yellow. Rosencrantz stumbles through another abortive tale about the meeting of a Christian, a Moslem, and a Jew, and a final one-line failed story about the meeting of a Hindu, a Buddhist, and a liontamer.

These failed stories mark the end of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's turning to illusion as a more attractive alternative to "reality." They will hereafter see no unicorns, but only horses with arrows in their foreheads. Instead of enjoying the opportunities for play offered by the script, they will fear the end of the script, fear death. Interspersed in the failed stories are Rosencrantz's twin recognitions, "We have no control" (p. 71), an exact repetition of the Player's earlier comment about the nature of fate for characters caught up in a script, and "there's only one direction" (p. 72), not South, but death. Rosencrantz brings the sequence to a close by declaring, "I forbid anyone to enter!" (p. 72). Previously, they had hoped that someone would come on to save them from stagnation, but now, sensing that the script is headed in the one direction they do not want to go, they wish to be left alone.

To underscore their lack of control, Rosencrantz's request to be left alone is met by the immediate entrance of "a grand procession" (p. 72), including Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, and Ophelia. The insult is extended as, amidst Rosencrantz's complaint, "It's like living in a public park!" (p. 75), Hamlet intrudes as well, followed by Alfred, dressed like the Queen, and the Player. As a preliminary indication of his inability to "read" the conventions of the theater, Rosencrantz mistakes Alfred (in costume) for Queen Gertrude and attempts to play the child's "Guess

who?!" (p. 75) game. The Player spoils his game by answering "Alfred!" (p. 75), illustrating that the Player is, after all, in charge of playing, for he understands the conventions of the theater as Rosencrantz obviously does not. Rosencrantz leaves this embarrassing situation to face immediately yet another insult which again demonstrates how far his fortunes have fallen in comparison to the Player's. Hoping to repeat his earlier coup, when, much to the chagrin of the Player, he retrieved a coin from under the Player's foot, Rosencrantz "bends to put his hand on the floor" (pp. 75-76). But "the Player lowers his foot" (p. 76), after which Rosencrantz "screams" (p. 76). The Player is firmly in charge now after having, quite literally, put his foot down.

His position consolidated, the Player plays both director and schoolmaster in the ensuing sequence, two very fitting roles of power. The play he directs is Hamlet--"a slaughterhouse--eight corpses all told" (p. 83), the Player explains. Though the Tragedians' performance begins exactly like the play-within-the-play in Hamlet, the dumb show is allowed to continue much further in Rosencrantz, all the way to the "deaths" of "Rosencrantz" and "Guildenstern." As Hinden argues, the two plays-within-the-play differ not only in length, but in function as well. Whereas The Murder of Gonzago "simplifies the world around it and so accurately holds up a mirror to that world that it can

catch the conscience of a king in its reflection,"¹⁰⁸ Hamlet, both the play-within and the play-without Rosencrantz, "breaks its bonds and finally overwhelms the parent play, but the image it catches in reflection is a baffling one to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern."¹⁰⁹ The play-within-Rosencrantz undermines rather than reinforces mimesis, for it mirrors not "life," but one of the competing modes of theater. While we understand The Murder of Gonzago to be a reflection of Hamlet, which is in turn a reflection of Renaissance reality, we understand Hamlet in Rosencrantz as a script, an artificial construct, which is governed by a set of conventions based on a world view we no longer accept as valid.

The Truth value of the Hamlet script is further undermined by the Player's lessons about the conventions of the theater, which he teaches while the performance of Hamlet is in progress. This is to be his most extended teaching session, but it falls on the deaf ears of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who cling ever more stubbornly to an old aesthetic based on Truth and "realism." It is decidedly more effective, however, as a lesson to the audience, for we recognize that the pair's falling fortunes are directly related to their unwillingness to adopt the revised aesthetic advocated by the Player.

The Player explains first that the dumbshow is "a device, really" (p. 77) and then when Guildenstern misreads

an act break that leaves "practically everyone on his feet" (p. 79) at the end, the Player laughs and further explains, "There's a design at work in all art--surely you know that? Events must play themselves out to aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion" (p. 79). Art is governed by its own rules, invariable rules, as the Player teaches when Guildenstern responds to his general pronouncement by asking a limited, plot-oriented question: "And what's that, in this case?" (p. 79). "It never varies," the Player replies. "We aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death dies" (p. 79). Guildenstern's question reveals how fully he has failed to understand his lessons: "Who decides?" (p. 80). He is still searching for an ultimate source of fate, a God or Author to provide the single starting point, the origin. In spite of their complete failure to determine where they came from, in spite of the blending and clashing of theatrical modes they have witnessed, and in spite of the Player's lessons about the baselessness of Truth, Guildenstern still insists on believing in origins and the Truth of theatrical representation. The Player is obviously shocked by his question, which could not be posited on aesthetic assumptions more different from his own. "Decides?" (p. 80), he asks incredulously. "It is written" (p. 80).

The Player knows that the script is not a line of words with a single origin and end, but is instead "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of

them original, blend and clash."¹¹⁰ Guildenstern's questions, "Who decides?" (p. 80), is typical of a critic working within the confines of the old aesthetic, which Barthes ironically describes as proceeding by "allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained'--victory to the critic."¹¹¹ The Player has already taught Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that there may be nothing beneath the script and that it does not make any difference one way or the other. "Who decides?"--who controls fate, who served as the origin of the script--is an irrelevant question at best, a positively debilitating one at worst. Rosencrantz systematically undermines the old aesthetic model by defying "originality" with its overt borrowing, by defying "realism" with its blatant blending and clashing of incompatible theatrical modes, and by denying the Truth of representation by repeatedly exposing theater as a set of conventions entirely separate from "reality."

In spite of all the overwhelming evidence pointing to the errors in their aesthetic assumptions, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern cling stubbornly to these antiquated assumptions, insisting on the old limits to theatrical representation. When the performance continues, Rosencrantz objects, "Oh, I say--here--really! You can't do that!" (p. 80), sounding quite a bit like a stuffy critic objecting

to, say, Rosencrantz. "Why not?" (p. 80), the Player asks. Indeed, why not? What is there to stop the theater from doing whatever it wants? "What do you want--jokes?" (p. 80), the Player asks. Rosencrantz states his aesthetic preference: "I want a good story, with a beginning, middle and end" (p. 80). No wonder Rosencrantz is having such a rough time of things, getting his hand stepped on and being embarrassed at every turn. His aesthetic principles date back to Aristotle's teleological formula, when art derived its structure from a world view that had God (or the gods) as its Alpha and Omega. Guildenstern's statement of aesthetic preference is equally antiquated: "I'd prefer art to mirror life" (p. 81). The former unicorn advocate has decidedly become a spokesman for horses with arrows in their foreheads. Guildenstern has, by "a choice of persuasions," opted to ignore the implications of all that he has witnessed and all that he has been taught. In contrast to his earlier advice to relax and enjoy the opportunities for play afforded by the script, he joins Rosencrantz in futilely adhering to outdated aesthetic assumptions that render both of them incapable of "reading" the script.

Their inability to "read" the script is illustrated very clearly by their confused reaction to the Tragedians' enactment of the "deaths" of "Rosencrantz" and "Guildenstern." They watch as the dumbshow rolls toward its conclusion, portraying two spies, dressed in coats identical

to those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, being prepared for execution by the Player, now in the role of the English King. Rosencrantz "approaches 'his' SPY doubtfully [and] does not quite understand why the coats are familiar" (p. 82). Unable to interpret the script, he comments confusedly:

Well if it isn't--! No, wait a minute, don't tell me--it's a long time since--where was it? Ah, this is taking me back to--when was it? I know you, don't I? I never forget a face--(he looks into the SPY's face) . . . not that I know yours, that is. For a moment I thought--no, I don't know you, do I? Yes, I'm afraid you're quite wrong. You must have mistaken me for someone else. (p. 82)

The rehearsal culminates in the execution--"The SPIES die at some length, rather well" (p. 84)--but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern refuse the lesson of the performance. Faced, as Egan explains, with a "prophetic mirroring of [their] future,"¹¹² Guildenstern protests, "No, no, no . . . you've got it all wrong . . ." (p. 84). He then denies that death can be represented at all: "You can't act death. The fact of it is nothing to do with seeing it happen--it's not gasps and blood and falling about" (p. 84). Death, Guildenstern insists, is "just a man failing to reappear, that's all--now you see him, now you don't, that's the only thing that's real" (p. 84).

We might at this point feel comfortable with declaring the aesthetic debate between the Player and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be a clear victory for the Player. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's fortunes have fallen precipitously, and we in the audience know that they are headed

straight for death. But things are rarely so simple and straightforward in a Stoppard play, and they are never simple and straightforward in Rosencrantz, perhaps his most thoroughly open-ended achievement. Perlette argues convincingly that Guildenstern's protest that "you can't act death" (p. 84) points simultaneously to the Truth of death according to Freud and to a further truth about "the limits of theatrical representation."¹¹³ "Guildenstern's insistence upon dissociating death from 'seeing it happen' is," he argues,

not only a recognition that nothing can represent the abstract negativity of death to us. It is also a confirmation of Freud's recognition of the structural key to this impossibility, namely that every representation (imaginative image or dramatic spectacle) falls short because, by the very act of witnessing it, "we really survive as spectators."¹¹⁴

Theater will, because of "the structural limits of the medium itself,"¹¹⁵ always fall short of adequately representing death, for by its very nature, it reinforces our psychological self-deception about death, encouraging us to believe that we really survive as spectators.

In representing in Rosencrantz that death cannot be represented, Perlette argues, Stoppard creates "a curiously contradictory effect."¹¹⁶ When we identify with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as spectators, "we are put into the position of identifying with their inability to identify,"¹¹⁷ and "we are expected to be 'satisfied' with the adequacy of

a representation representing the inadequacy of representation."¹¹⁸ Furthermore, "we are asked to see a certain reality in the representation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's recognition that representations don't give them reality."¹¹⁹ Perlette accurately views these "flat contradictions"¹²⁰ as "aporia or insolubilia"¹²¹ which are not meant to be resolved. "They are," he argues, "the structural counterpart of the play's thematic of uncertainty."¹²² Because of this reflexivity--the play calls into question the whole nature of representation which lies at the heart of the theatrical experience--Rosencrantz pushes theater to its limits. When a medium is "operating at the extremity of its own limits,"¹²³ he argues further, "we must recognize that any insight, truth, or reality we would be tempted to derive here is thoroughly undermined."¹²⁴

This process of undermining Truth and reality is not, of course, confined to a single speech of protestation by Guildenstern. Virtually all that has preceded and all that follows Guildenstern's speech is equally a part of the same process. When the dumbshow is brought to an abrupt conclusion by "Shouts . . . 'The King rises! . . . 'Give o'er the play! . . . cries for 'Lights, lights, lights!'" (pp. 84-85), Rosencrantz returns to his old search for direction. "That must be east, then. I think we can assume that" (p. 85), he observes as the light grows. Guildenstern declines to pursue the question of where they came from,

though, sensing the futility of their search for origins. "I've been taken in before" (p. 85), he replies, refusing to play that game again.

But they are no longer gameless as they were briefly at the height of their insistence on the Truth of theatrical representation. Perhaps as a subtle indication of the potential credibility of their position about the limits of what can be represented, they are tentatively welcomed back into the fold of play. Their game, however, has rather ominous undertones, for it overtly echoes the final game Vladimir and Estragon play in Godot as they temporarily decide to commit suicide with the cord Estragon uses to hold up his oversized trousers. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern decide to catch Hamlet in a trap created by joining their two belts together. Rosencrantz's "trousers slide slowly down" (p. 89) when he removes his belt, just as Estragon's had fallen in Godot.

Their trap fails, but Hamlet surprises Rosencrantz by coming on when he simply shouts "Lord Hamlet!" (p. 90). The talk is of death, for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been given another mission by Claudius, to find out what Hamlet has done "with the dead body" (p. 90) of Polonius. Upon completion of their "trying episode" (p. 92) with the Hamlet cast, Rosencrantz complains, "They'll have us hanging about till we're dead. At least. And the weather will change. The spring can't last forever" (p. 93). Rosencrantz

has not, of course, abruptly dropped the topic of death to make polite conversation about the weather. When he continues, "We'll be cold. The summer won't last" (p. 93), and Guildenstern replies "It's autumnal" (p. 94), we recognize that the pair is invoking the poetic code of representing death, using the universal, even banal code of the cycle of seasons to describe the beginning and end of human life. Guildenstern's speech beginning "Autumnal--nothing to do with the leaves. It is to do with a certain brownness at the edges of day. . . . Brown is creeping up on us, take my word for it . . ." (p. 94) is less poetry than a parody of poetic codes, for in addition to using the cliché of seasons, it continues with a catalogue of colors that one inevitably associates with the flowery language of overly ornate poetry. "Russets and tangerine shades of old gold flushing the very outside edge of the senses . . . deep shining ochres, burnt umber and parchments of baked earth--reflecting on itself and through itself" (p. 94). Brown may indeed be creeping up on them, but the poetic code of representation is no more an adequate discourse for describing death than are any of the other competing discourses. No code, no theatrical or literary mode can ever truly provide the "thin beam of light" (p. 83) that might "crack the shell of mortality" (p. 83), for death remains the "undiscover'd country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns";¹²⁵ it remains the thing which cannot be represented.

The second act comes to an end momentarily, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bound for England on Claudius's orders. This time, the act break marks a real change, complete with a new setting, which provides Stoppard with the opportunity to pull one of his funniest and most characteristic jokes, the joke that provides a large measure of the humor in The Real Inspector Hound--exaggerated exposition. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern begin the act in typical uncertainty. After determining various bits of vital information, that they are still alive, for example, Stoppard's stage directions call for sailors shouting "obscure but inescapably nautical instructions" (p. 98), including (he provides a short list) "Hard a larboard! Let go the stays! Reef down me hearties!" (p. 98). "When the point has been well made and more so" (p. 98), Rosencrantz arrives at the brilliant conclusion, "We're on a boat" (p. 98).

The marked change of setting, however, is a bit of a false lead, for very little else actually changes in Stoppard's final, shortest act, which is more a matter of tying up the "loose ends" Rosencrantz and Guildenstern mention repeatedly than one of new direction. The third act is a time for recapitulating themes and motifs already in place and a time for playing with the limits of theatrical representation. When an inexplicable "better light--Lantern? Moon? . . . Light" (p. 99) finally elucidates the stage, we see "three large man-sized casks on deck" (p. 99)--props for the barrel tricks--and "a gaudy striped umbrella

[. . .] one of those huge six-foot-diameter jobs" (p. 99). We will soon discover that the umbrella hides Hamlet. Why would the Prince of Denmark be sitting behind a huge, gaudy, striped beach umbrella? The third act repeatedly asks us, why not? If we are no longer tied to the limits imposed by realism, why cannot Hamlet be sitting under a beach umbrella? Why cannot the Players "emerge, impossibly, from [a] barrel" (p. 122)? None of the many blatant violations of the realistic code that punctuate the third act provokes any comment from the on-stage spectators, and their suspension of disbelief provides those of us in the off-stage audience with our cue for responding to the bizarreness of the third act--"Enjoy it. Relax [. . .] it's like being given a prize" (p. 40). Stoppard's extension of the limits of theater eradicates the need to explain away unicorns as horses with arrows in their foreheads.

Prior to the unsurprising surprise attack by pirates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spend their time on the boat engaged in activities which are by now very familiar to the audience. They play games with coins, and they sort out the confusion surrounding which one received the letter of instruction from Claudius, an extension of the identity confusion which has plagued them through two acts. They contemplate the nature of fate and free will at length, but, as always, inconclusively. Guildenstern proclaims that "We can do what we like and say what we like to whomever

we like, without restriction" (p. 116), but Rosencrantz undermines this sweeping proclamation of freedom by adding, "Within limits, of course" (p. 116). "Certainly within limits" (p. 116), Guildenstern agrees, dismantling the whole structure. They role-play again, with Guildenstern taking the part of the English King and questioning Rosencrantz about just why he came to England. As in Act Two, they find themselves unable to overcome the "abstract negativity of death."¹²⁶ Rosencrantz explains that whenever he tries to think of England, he draws a blank. "I have no image. I try to picture us arriving, a little harbour perhaps . . . roads[. . . .] But my mind remains a blank" (p. 108). And as has happened repeatedly in the play, just when they have run out of games to play and topics to discuss (inconclusively), they hear the sound of a band, the Tragedians "playing together a familiar tune which has been heard three times before" (p. 113). Rosencrantz's "I thought I heard a band" (p. 114) is both another humorous statement of the obvious and a pointed repetition of an observation he has made in both of the previous acts, a repetition which calls attention to the truth of his complaint that "nothing is happening" (p. 102) and Guildenstern's exclamation, "No wonder the whole thing is so stagnant!" (p. 104).

Act Three is stagnant, at least until the pirates attack and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the Player emerge from the wrong barrels (as Stoppard has some fun

with the possibilities of trap doors). The disappearance of Hamlet during the pirate attack, though, saves the final act from stagnation by reintroducing the topic of death. "Is he dead?" (p. 119), Rosencrantz inquires about Hamlet. When Guildenstern confirms that Hamlet is "not coming back" (p. 119), Rosencrantz reiterates the pair's position on death: "He's dead then. He's dead as far as we're concerned" (p. 119). Death is, for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "just a man failing to reappear" (p. 84).

Once death is reintroduced, events roll rapidly toward their open-ended conclusion, replacing the pointed stagnation of the earlier part of the act, which we recognize as a sort of deliberate lull, a period of buying time through the reiteration of lines and the replaying of games. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have exhausted their lines, run out of playing time--almost. One more round in the debate concerning death, and the representation of death, remains.

It opens with the anguished cry of the absurdist situation: "But why? Was it all for this? Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths. . . . Who are we?" (p. 122), Guildenstern asks. The Player's reply, "You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That's enough" (p. 122) is "not enough" (p. 122) for Guildenstern. And when the Player smugly holds to his old position with "In our experience, most things end in death" (p. 123), Guildenstern temporarily forgets himself, and his position that

death is "just a man failing to reappear," as "He snatches a dagger from the PLAYER'S belt and holds the point at the PLAYER'S throat" (p. 123). He delivers a very dramatic speech beginning, "I'm talking about death--and you've never experienced that. And you cannot act it" (p. 123). It culminates in his convincing proclamation, "No one gets up after death--there is no applause--there is only silence and some second hand clothes, and that's--death--" (p. 123). With that, Guildenstern "pushes the blade in up to the hilt" (p. 123), and the Player "makes small weeping sounds and falls to his knees, and then right down" (p. 123). As Guildenstern's sometime competitor, sometime teacher dies, Guildenstern delivers a rhetorically balanced, moving elegy: "If we have a destiny, then so had he--and if this is ours, then that was his--and if there are no explanations for us, then let there be none for him--" (p. 123).

But the Player does get up after this, the most theatrically convincing death in the whole play, and there is applause as the Tragedians respond to their leader's performance "with genuine admiration" (p. 123). His "death" is the result of another illusion, a trick sword, a device much like the trap doors under the barrels. If we are surprised by his resurrection, it is not because we thought the sword was real, but because we do not expect to see the illusion of the trick sword revealed on stage. But the Player's resurrection is not simply another joke at the

expense of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and another pat victory for the Player. As Perlette argues, the fake death scene endorses both of their positions at the same time. Upon arising, the Player proclaims, "You see, it is the kind they do believe in--it's what is expected" (p. 123). He is right, of course; audiences are only prepared to believe in the sort of patently theatrical performance he has just given. But Guildenstern is also right in insisting that the belief we invest in such a performance does not take us any closer to experiencing the void of death. While we may "believe" in the Player's death, we still survive the spectacle as spectators. And "this, as Guildenstern has been insisting, is the cheat at the heart of representations of death which renders them inadequate,"¹²⁷ Perlette observes. We may "believe" in the Player's performance, but only "because we are distanced (protected) from [it] by a fundamental disbelief."¹²⁸ Guildenstern's position is backed by the position of the play as a whole which, as Perlette argues, "once again . . . has gone out of its way to make us aware that the reality of death is simply inaccessible to us."¹²⁹

The reality of death is inaccessible to us no matter what mode of representation is used, and the various modes blend and clash to a crescendo in the closing moments of the play. The absurdist discourse has given way to the most theatrically convincing death in the entire play, but this

death is immediately revealed as yet another trick. After brushing himself off, the Player breaks into the discourse of a carnival man hawking his spectacles: "Deaths for all ages and occasions! Deaths by suspension, convulsion, consumption, and malnutrition--! Climactic carnage, by poison and by steel--!" (p. 124). Then, as the Tragedians perform a variety of these deaths and "the two SPIES dressed in the same coats as ROS and GUIL, are stabbed, as before" (p. 124), the light begins to fade, and the Player switches to the poetic code of representing death. "Dying amid the dying--tragically; romantically" (p. 124), he goes down for the final time with, "Light goes with life, and in the winter of your years the dark comes early" (p. 124).

Guildenstern rejects all these discourses--the carnival call to witness a spectacle, the spectacles themselves, and the romance of poetic death. "No . . . no . . . not for us, not like that. Dying is not romantic, and death is not a game which will soon be over . . . Death is not anything . . . death is not . . ." (p. 124), Guildenstern tiredly argues as the mime comes to a close, leaving the "dead" bodies of the Tragedians scattered on stage. And when "death" finally comes to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, it follows the script Guildenstern has written: "It's just a man failing to reappear, that's all--now you see him, now you don't" (p. 84). There are no "gasps and blood and falling about" (p. 84); the Player's version of the death

of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never materializes. Instead of being executed at the hands of the English King as the Tragedians have twice performed it, Rosencrantz simply disappears from view, leaving Guildenstern to remark, "Well, we'll know better next time. Now you see me, now you--" (p. 126). Amidst the words of a magic trick, he disappears also.

But one more discourse requires final playing time, and immediately after Guildenstern disappears, "the whole stage is lit up, revealing, upstage, arranged in the approximate positions last held by the dead TRAGEDIANS, the tableau of court and corpses which is the last scene of Hamlet" (p. 126). This ending is a revision, for "in the first published edition of the play (May 1967) the action, like that of Waiting for Godot, is circular. . . . Someone is shouting and banging on a shutter, indistinctly calling two names."¹³⁰ In the revised version, Horatio's penultimate speech in Hamlet is the last word, as he first denies that Hamlet ordered the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and then, in effect, introduces the beginning of the play:

. . . give order that these bodies
high on a stage be placed to the view;
and let me speak to the yet unknowing world
how these things came about: so shall you hear
of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
deaths put on by cunning and forced cause, . . .
. . . all this can I
truly deliver. (p. 126)

Stoppard's revision retains the circularity of his earlier version, but it is much richer than the simple circularity of someone's banging on shutters. While the earlier version would have endorsed the absurdist mode, Horatio's words invoke the same circularity while denying an endorsement of the Truth of any specific theatrical mode. These words are Shakespeare's, but they are also part of our common mythology, and as such, they resonate through the history of theater, encouraging us to realize that no matter what mode of representation is used, the world will always remain "yet unknowing." Horatio's description, coming so soon after the Player has hawked his spectacles like a carnival man, takes on a subdued carnival flavor itself: "carnal, bloody and unnatural acts, / of accidental judgments, casual slaughters, / of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause" (p. 126).

The ambiguity of the final spectacle joins the ambiguity of the final words to thoroughly resist closure. The Hamlet cast assumes "the approximate positions last held by the dead TRAGEDIANS" (p. 126), visually conflating the two modes of theater the two casts represent, as Horatio's speech conflates the circularity of absurdism, the language of tragedy, and a hint of the language of a carnival. The closing tableau does not so much provide the final answer as it raises a multitude of questions. Is this death according to tragedy's grand design, never grander than

in Hamlet, the central tragedy of our language? Or is this death as the Tragedians perform it, glibly, without "dignity, nothing classical, portentous, only this--a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes . . ." (p. 27)? Or is death a sort of carnival freak show, as the words of both Horatio and the Player suggest? Or is it pointedly absurd, as Guildenstern's anguished cry--"But why?" (p. 122)--and the Beckettian circularity suggest? Or is death just another trick, as Guildenstern's final magician's discourse indicates?

It is death as "It is written" (p. 80) in a variety of modes, none of which can directly expose us to the inscrutable, unknowable reality of death. Stoppard shows us, through a series of dislocating contradictions, that death remains what it has always been--the thing which cannot be represented. These contradictions pervade the play, operating at the level of the Beckett joke, where a confident statement is followed by refutations which dismantle the whole structure that has just been built, as well as at the larger level, where one discourse bumps into another and then another, qualifying and undermining the Truth of the preceding discourse until none of the discourses retains its Truth value. Even until the final curtain, the blending and clashing of modes continues, refusing closure. Rosenkrantz does not so much stop on one discourse at the end as it plays all of them in rapid succession, "ending" with

a discourse that both suggests another beginning and contains elements of previous discourses within itself.

The blending and clashing of modes, which is vital to the structure and themes of Rosencrantz, undermines the critical hierarchy favoring originality over derivativeness. We are hard put in Rosencrantz to distinguish between the "original" segments and the derivative ones because the writing is so heavily sedimented that we begin to suspect that all of it could be traced back to a "source," which would then likely slip to reveal another "source" behind it, and so on, endlessly. As this critical hierarchy begins to collapse, it carries others down with it. Because of the blatant blending and clashing of modes, no mode is given the authority of being designated as more "realistic" than any other; thus, the distinction between reality and illusion, life and art, begins to blur as well. The illusion of art is presented less as a parasite on the reality of life than as a realm of its own, governed by its own conventions, chief among which is the agreement between actors and audience to play their respective roles.

In teaching us, showing us, that the play of the theater need not stop in the absence of Truth, "originality," and "realism," Rosencrantz also breaks down the opposition between art and criticism, yet another manifestation of logocentrism, another traditional host/parasite relationship. Just as contemporary critical theory has moved

progressively toward becoming a literary genre in its own right, thereby diminishing the distinction between Art, the host, and criticism, its parasite, so Rosencrantz graciously responds to the invitation by stepping on to the dance floor and embracing contemporary critical theory as its partner. As the play teaches us so many of the lessons of contemporary theory--that art never depended on Truth, "reality," or "originality"--it also reassures us that we do not have to sacrifice any of the magic of the theater as we leave these old assumptions behind. The play of the theater need not stop in the absence of a center, a Truth.

Though art has never been able to expose us to the reality of life, or of death, the play of styles, of "words, words" (p. 41), keeps right on going. In fact, the room for play may be even bigger without the old constraints imposed by the need to feign "originality" and "realism," the need to present us with the final Truth. Now there is room for a variety of discourses instead of just One, and room for many witnesses to play with unicorns, though not, perhaps, enough room for those who would, by "a choice of persuasions," see only horses with arrows in their foreheads.

Notes

¹Tom Stoppard, "Second Interview with Tom Stoppard," in Ronald Hayman, Tom Stoppard, Contemporary Playwrights Series, 3rd ed. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 143.

²Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 80. All further quotations refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text. Unless otherwise indicated by brackets, all ellipses are Stoppard's.

³Robert Brustein, "Waiting for Hamlet," New Republic, 4 November 1967, p. 25.

⁴Brustein, p. 25.

⁵C.O. Gardner, "Correspondence: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Theoria: A Journal of Studies in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences 34 (May 1970): 83.

⁶Gardner, p. 83.

⁷Christopher Nichols, "Theater: R & G: A Minority Report," National Review, 12 December 1967, p. 1394.

⁸Robert Egan, "A Thin Beam of Light: The Purpose of Playing in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Theatre Journal 31 (March 1979): 59.

⁹Egan, p. 59.

¹⁰Normand Berlin, "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead: Theater of Criticism," Modern Drama 16 (December 1973): 271.

¹¹Berlin, p. 269.

¹²Berlin, p. 269.

¹³Margarete Holubetz, "A Mocking of Theatrical Conventions: The Fake Death Scene in The White Devil and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," English Studies 63 (October 1982): 426-429.

¹⁴Ruby Cohn, Modern Shakespeare Offshoots (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 215.

¹⁵Cohn, p. 215.

¹⁶Cohn, p. 215.

¹⁷Cohn, p. 217.

¹⁸Cohn, p. 217.

¹⁹Hayman, p. 34.

²⁰Hayman, p. 34.

²¹Hayman, p. 34.

²²Jill L. Levenson, "Tom Stoppard's Two Versions: 'Hamlet' Andante/'Hamlet' Allegro," in Shakespeare Survey 36, ed. Stanley Wells (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), p. 21.

²³Levenson, p. 22.

²⁴Levenson, p. 22.

²⁵Levenson, p. 23.

²⁶Levenson, p. 23.

²⁷Levenson, p. 23.

²⁸William E. Gruber, "'Wheels within Wheels, etcetera'": Artistic Design in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Comparative Drama 15 (Winter 1981-1982): 291.

²⁹Gruber, p. 291.

³⁰Gruber, p. 291.

³¹Gruber, p. 291.

³²Gruber, p. 291.

³³Richard Corballis, Stoppard: The Mystery and the Clockwork (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 48.

³⁴Robert Wilcher, "The Museum of Tragedy: Endgame and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Journal of Beckett Studies 4 (1979): 44.

³⁵Wilcher, p. 44.

³⁶Wilcher, p. 43.

³⁷Wilcher, p. 44.

³⁸Wilcher, p. 51.

³⁹Wilcher, p. 44.

⁴⁰Wilcher, p. 47.

⁴¹Wilcher, p. 47.

⁴²Wilcher, p. 47.

⁴³Wilcher, p. 48.

⁴⁴Wilcher, p. 48.

⁴⁵Wilcher, p. 49.

⁴⁶Wilcher, p. 51.

⁴⁷Wilcher, p. 51.

⁴⁸Wilcher, p. 51.

⁴⁹Wilcher, p. 51.

⁵⁰Wilcher, p. 51.

⁵¹Richard Corballis, "Extending the Audience: The Structure of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Ariel 11 (April 1980): 65.

⁵²Corballis, "Extending," p. 65.

⁵³Corballis, "Extending," p. 65.

⁵⁴Corballis, "Extending," p. 68.

⁵⁵Corballis, "Extending," p. 66.

⁵⁶Corballis, "Extending," p. 66.

⁵⁷Corballis, "Extending," p. 66.

⁵⁸Corballis, "Extending," p. 66.

⁵⁹Corballis, "Extending," p. 78.

⁶⁰Corballis, "Extending," p. 68.

⁶¹Corballis, "Extending," p. 68.

⁶²Corballis, "Extending," p. 70.

⁶³Corballis, "Extending," p. 73.

⁶⁴Corballis, "Extending," p. 74.

⁶⁵Corballis, "Extending," p. 75.

⁶⁶Corballis, "Extending," p. 73.

⁶⁷ Corballis, "Extending," p. 77.

⁶⁸ Michael Hinden, "Jumpers: Stoppard and the Theater of Exhaustion," Twentieth Century Literature 27 (Spring 1981): 1.

⁶⁹ John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," cited in Hinden, p. 1. The article originally appeared in the Atlantic, pp. 29-34. All subsequent quotations refer to the original article.

⁷⁰ Hinden, p. 2.

⁷¹ Hinden, p. 2.

⁷² Hinden, p. 2.

⁷³ Hinden, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Barth, p. 31.

⁷⁵ Hinden, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Barth, p. 31.

⁷⁷ Hinden, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Hinden, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Barth, p. 29.

⁸⁰ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 146.

⁸¹ John M. Perlette, "Theatre at the Limit: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," forthcoming in Modern Drama. While Perlette demonstrates that the play supports a Freudian vision of death, he goes further to argue that it ultimately undermines any truth we might be tempted to derive since the play operates at the limits of theater.

⁸² Barthes, p. 147.

⁸³ Hamlet, 5.2.10.

⁸⁴ Egan, p. 65.

⁸⁵ Egan, p. 65.

⁸⁶ Egan, p. 65.

⁸⁷Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Post-Modernism," in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 67.

⁸⁸Tom Stoppard, "First Interview with Tom Stoppard," in Hayman, p. 7.

⁸⁹Tom Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 7.

⁹⁰Egan, p. 62.

⁹¹Egan, p. 62.

⁹²Wilcher, p. 50.

⁹³Hamlet, 2.2.192.

⁹⁴Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 33b.

⁹⁵Beckett, p. 8.

⁹⁶Helen Keyssar-Franke, "The Strategy of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Educational Theatre Journal 27 (1975), p. 93.

⁹⁷Keyssar-Franke, p. 93.

⁹⁸Keyssar-Franke, p. 93.

⁹⁹Wilcher, p. 50.

¹⁰⁰T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems" in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (Atlanta: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 789.

¹⁰¹Eliot, p. 789.

¹⁰²Revelation 1:8.

¹⁰³Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," cited in Hinden, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴Keyssar-Franke, p. 93.

¹⁰⁵Keyssar-Franke, p. 93.

¹⁰⁶Perlette, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷Perlette, p. 6.

- 108 Hinden, p. 3.
- 109 Hinden, p. 3.
- 110 Barthes, p. 146.
- 111 Barthes, p. 1.
- 112 Egan, p. 65.
- 113 Perlette, pp. 7-8.
- 114 Perlette, p. 7.
- 115 Perlette, p. 8.
- 116 Perlette, p. 8.
- 117 Perlette, p. 10.
- 118 Perlette, p. 10.
- 119 Perlette, p. 10.
- 120 Perlette, p. 9.
- 121 Perlette, p. 10.
- 122 Perlette, p. 10.
- 123 Perlette, p. 10.
- 124 Perlette, p. 9.
- 125 Hamlet, 3.1.78-79.
- 126 Perlette, p. 7.
- 127 Perlette, p. 13.
- 128 Perlette, p. 13.
- 129 Perlette, p. 14.
- 130 Hayman, p. 46.

TRAVESTIES OR TOM STOPPARD
SORTS IT OUT

One of the impulses in Travesties is to try to sort out what my answer would in the end be if I was given enough time to think every time I'm asked why my plays aren't political, or ought they to be?

--Tom Stoppard¹

Much more directly and explicitly than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Stoppard's 1974 Travesties addresses the related questions of Truth, the political function of art, and the concept of originality in authorship. In Rosencrantz, Stoppard worked from a distanced perspective, setting his play about two inconsequential bit players from Hamlet in an innocuous "place of no name, character, population or significance."² And just as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are themselves safely void of immediate political relevance, so are Rosencrantz's two major competing theatrical modes, tragedy and absurdism. At a safe remove from the entangling encumbrances of specific political issues, Rosencrantz prompts us to revise our general aesthetic and political assumptions: as it encourages us to revise our aesthetic preference for Truth and closure in art, it simultaneously invites us to adjust our political preference for mastery, to question the Truth of

master narratives which seek to reduce the diversity of the world to a single interpretive discourse. Thus, although it steers clear of patently political content, Rosencrantz is nevertheless a profoundly political play, for it asks us to reconsider our whole conceptual framework for thinking about Truth and the authority of authors to bring us that Truth.

In Travesties, Stoppard zooms in for a more immediate, unfiltered exploration of largely the same questions, for the setting is Zurich during World War I, and his characters are of great political and artistic consequence. Centering his play around three key Author-Fathers of modern thought--Lenin, James Joyce, and Tristan Tzara--Stoppard engages the questions of authorship and the Truth of modernism's master narratives directly. And just as politically charged characters replace the neutral characters of Rosencrantz, so politically charged theatrical discourses replace the neutral discourses of the earlier play. In place of tragedy and absurdism, Travesties is built primarily from the blending and clashing of the comic mode of Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest and the didactic mode of Brecht's epic theater. The leftist political goals of the epic theater are obvious given Brecht's outspoken advocacy of Marxism. The political affiliations of comedy are certainly more understated, and indeed Earnest often serves as neutral ground for the characters, but the tendency of

comedy to endorse existing social values nevertheless pits the comic mode against the epic mode, which aims to undermine the same social values comedy supports.

The immediacy of Travesties' perspective may very well lie at the root of the most significant difference between the two plays: unlike Rosencrantz, which playfully resisted a stable center of Truth, Travesties ultimately endorses the Joycean vision at the expense of the visions of Lenin and Tzara. While the first half of Travesties recreates the open-ended, dislocating experience of Rosencrantz--questions are raised and answers are withheld as the play exposes the limits of competing discourses and demystifies the process of writing--the play abruptly turns about face in mid-stream. The radical change of course coincides with Joyce's moving speech insisting that "an artist is the magician put among men to gratify--capriciously--their urge for immortality."³ Unlike earlier speeches, Joyce's eloquent defense of the artist is allowed to stand unrefuted, and it is, furthermore, visually reinforced by the spectacle of Joyce's pulling a carnation, flags, and a rabbit out of a hat--magician style--as Tzara childishly smashes crockery in a fit of Dadaist destruction.

But Tzara is not the real loser of Travesties; that distinction belongs to Lenin, whose story bores us to tears in Act Two. And while we are turning numb from boredom, we hear Lenin's position persuasively rebutted by dialogue

which Stoppard repeats as his own version of Truth in a 1974 interview.⁴ Nor is the denunciation of Lenin confined to an unfortunate speech or two: the revolutionary is structurally ostracized as well. All the other characters get caught up in the action of The Importance of Being Earnest, but Lenin and his wife, Nadya, are, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern during their period of insisting on Truth, refused roles, denied play. Furthermore, unlike Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they are never welcomed into the fold, not even at the end: the concluding dance of comedy has room for Tzara and Gwendolen, British consular official Carr and Cecily, even (bizarrely) Joyce and Carr's manservant Bennett, but not, alas, for Lenin and Nadya. Like the scapegoats of earlier comedic tradition, they are sent off into exile, the exile of the Russian revolution, banished to atone for the sins of society.

As Lenin's position is denounced and Joyce's enjoys the endorsement of Truth, the two major competing theatrical modes get dragged into the imbroglio as well. As a result, the comic mode is spared as the Brechtian mode, through guilt by association with Lenin, also suffers an attack. This seems most regrettable, for when Stoppard's theater is at its best, as in Rosencrantz, it works according to central Brechtian principles. Rosencrantz, like the epic theater, does not allow the audience "to submit to an experience uncritically [. . .] by means of simple empathy

with the characters."⁵ Instead, the blending and clashing of modes takes "the subject-matter and the incidents shown and put[s] them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding."⁶ Rosencrantz constantly calls into question the whole concept of "what is 'natural'"⁷ and encourages the kind of critical inquiry into the motivations of modes of representation that Brecht hoped to encourage. Stoppard's stage environment, like Brecht's, is no longer simply "seen from the central figure's point of view";⁸ instead, it tells its own story, and in doing so, it makes us aware of the importance of the environment in shaping and even controlling what we used to call, naively perhaps, human nature. Though Stoppard uses clashing theatrical modes where Brecht preferred big screens and projected documents which "confirmed or contradicted what the characters said,"⁹ the effect of Stoppard's technique is remarkably similar to Brecht's. Furthermore, Stoppard achieves in Rosencrantz the combination of pleasure and instruction that Brecht thought vital to good theater. Given Stoppard's own success with central principles of the epic theater, it seems unfortunate that Travesties submits Brecht's theater to such an unfriendly travesty in Act Two, presenting it as some kind of humorless, leftist harangue delivered "from a high rostrum" (p. 85).

Perhaps because the two halves of the play move in such markedly different directions, critics do not universally agree that Joyce wins and Lenin loses. Craig Werner, for example, argued that although critics hailed Travesties "as a vindication of James Joyce."¹⁰ it is not that at all. "Centering his attention on the interaction of the mythologies of Art (represented by Joyce), Political Revolution (represented by Lenin), and Radical Individualism (represented by Tristan Tzara), Stoppard unveils the limitations of the twentieth century's most cherished systems of belief,"¹¹ he argued. In its best moments, which are almost exclusively limited to the play's first half, Travesties is indeed a rather spectacular exploration of the limitations of early twentieth century master narratives. But Travesties is not all great moments, and in the second half it slips into a master narrative of its own. For Werner, "Carr, a minor official at the British consulate in Zurich, stands firmly at the center of Travesties' thematic structure,"¹² and "Stoppard indicates that the nature of his mind and values is at least as much at issue as those of the three obviously important intellectual characters."¹³ He believes that Joyce and Lenin are equally discredited by their failure to convince Carr, a sort of twentieth century Everyman, and that "Tzara's myth comes closest to embodying Carr's Zurich experience."¹⁴ even if "it also fades quietly from historical memory."¹⁵

Even as perceptive a critic as Thomas Whitaker declares Tzara "easily the most captivating character on stage,"¹⁶ indicating that the voice of Truth which emerges in the second half does not completely negate the playfulness of the first half, in which Tzara co-stars with Carr. Whitaker argues that Tzara's "moral and political outrage"¹⁷ over the senseless slaughter of World War I "wins our sympathy."¹⁸ But he qualifies his reading of Tzara by noting that "his aleatory verses have meaning for us primarily because Stoppard has transformed them with Joycean word-play."¹⁹ Whitaker's qualification is crucial, for while Tzara's random verses may delight us, the credit for their verbal magic is ultimately taken away from Tzara and given to the true team of artist-magicians, Joyce and Stoppard. For Whitaker, the play is less an endorsement of any single character than a game which "asks us to refract both the content and the style of our playing through an ironic prism that illuminates several large questions: How do we make art? Or revolution? Or history? Or, indeed, any kind of meaning?"²⁰

Perhaps what is most surprising, and most encouraging, about the critical reaction to Travesties is the frequency of observations like Whitaker's which take into account the relationship between Stoppard's authorial strategy and his content. Though far less has been written about Travesties than about the more controversial Rosencrantz, we find that critics very often incorporate Stoppard's blatant

borrowing into their readings of the content of the play rather than insisting that the derivativeness is a sign of Stoppard's incompetence as a playwright. Not that Travesties completely escaped derision as a theatrical parasite: John Simon lumped it with the rest of Stoppard's plays, which he felt all "have in common to some degree . . . what I have at various times described with images culled from the animal and insect worlds, where the eggs or larvae of one species may be unconsciously hatched by the efforts, or fed by the very organisms, of another species."²¹ Nevertheless, critics for the most part moved with admirable speed beyond blanket condemnations of the play's derivativeness to recognize that Stoppard's borrowing serves as a structural counterpart for one of the play's central themes, namely, that all writing is "a tissue of quotations."²²

The explanation for this welcome change seems at least two-fold. In the first place, the content of Travesties is much more obviously centered on the process of writing than is Rosencrantz's content, so it more readily invites critics and audiences to make the connection between the outside and the inside of the play. Timing must also be taken into account. Not only does Travesties follow Rosencrantz, which in effect demonstrated that borrowing is a viable authorial strategy, but the perceptive readings of Travesties began to appear at roughly the same time (1978) that critics began to reject the parasite consensus

on Rosencrantz to ask instead how the derivativeness of Stoppard's 1966 play worked with its content. But this is not a simple matter of Travesties' basking in the glow of Rosencrantz, for if Travesties has reaped critical dividends from Rosencrantz's efforts to extend the limits of what we accept as a valid authorial strategy, Rosencrantz has also profited from Travesties' explicit treatment of borrowing as the common denominator of all writing. Travesties works as a sort of critical gloss for the earlier play, and the interpretive frame it provides must surely have contributed to the collapse of the parasite consensus on Rosencrantz.

Michael Hinden tacitly acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between the two plays, for he uses the same John Barth context to read the borrowing in Travesties that he used to account for the borrowing in Rosencrantz. Thus, he sees Travesties as "another possible tribute to theatrical 'exhaustion'"²³ because Stoppard uses "Wilde's self-conscious farce"²⁴ in Travesties in much the same way he used Hamlet in Rosencrantz. Hinden, however, fears that "the gears of Travesties do not mesh as smoothly as those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,"²⁵ in part because "Stoppard editorializes in the play, siding with Joyce on major issues."²⁶ Other critics seem less concerned with Stoppard's editorializing and more interested in his efforts to revise the old view of authorship. Ian Donaldson argued in 1980 that "behind the exuberant nonsense

of Stoppard's play glitters the beginnings of a serious proposition: that art, and indeed other forms of creative enterprise, are essentially a matter of the stylish bringing-together of miscellaneous scraps and particles which in themselves, discretely, may be of negligible interest.²⁷ John William Cooke put forth a similar argument in 1981: "The process of making meaning--be it telling a story, writing Ulysses, or composing socialist history--is the central focus of Stoppard's play."²⁸ And Margaret Gold specifically cited the relationship between Stoppard's strategy and the debates within the play, observing that Travesties' "stylistic and thematic ventures proceed in tandem,"²⁹ for the play is "pastiche, a cut and paste job like the one Tzara performs on Shakespeare's sonnet number 18."³⁰ Thus, she argued that "Tzara's pastiche is a metaphor for Stoppard's methods."³¹

Pastiche is indeed the method, in Travesties as well as in Rosencrantz, but from the moment the curtain rises, Stoppard goes out of his way to show us that Tzara is by no means unique in composing his writing from scraps. In fact, the entire opening scene, including Carr's narrative bridge, is a brilliantly executed rebuttal to the traditional concept of authorship. Tzara may open the scene with an ostentatious display of the cut and paste method--he uses "a hat and a large pair of scissors" (p. 17)--but Joyce likewise composes by "searching his pockets for tiny

scraps of paper" (p. 19), and at one point, he "encounters a further scrap of paper which is lying on the floor: LENIN has inadvertently dropped it" (p. 20). Thus, as Cooke argues, "rather than drawing distinctions among Lenin, Joyce, and Tzara, Stoppard emphasizes their similarities: they are all makers, composing their works from facts out of context, apparent scraps."³² "Whether the products are novels, histories, or dadaist poems," he continues, "the process is the same."³³

When the characters speak in the opening scene, to read aloud from their scraps, the verbal dimension reinforces the visual, for in spite of the widely varying authorial intents behind the writings, any scrap has roughly the same chance as another of sounding like nonsense--or genius--depending upon what kind of expertise the particular spectator in question brings to the theater. Tzara's "Eel ate enormous appletzara" (p. 18), though deliberately nonsensical, may strike an ear accustomed to the sounds of French (which would then hear "Il est un homme, s'appelle Tzara")³⁴ as more intelligible than Joyce's "Deshill holles eamus" (p. 18), unless our ideal audience member is also intimately acquainted with Ulysses. And Lenin's acronym-ridden "G.E.C. (U.S.A.) 250 million marks" (p. 20) may very well sound like nonsense to a spectator whose love of languages and literature has left little time for the study of economics.

In this opening scene, styles and even languages (Lenin and Nadya engage in an extended conversation in Russian, and there is a quadrilingual apology as Lenin retrieves his scrap of paper from Joyce) blend and clash in such rapid succession that the closing moments of Rosen
crantz seem tame by comparison. As language is ripped from its context, the audience becomes "the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed."³⁵ And though Barthes optimistically adds "without any of them being lost,"³⁶ many of the quotations that make up this elaborate linguistic game must necessarily be lost on all but the most erudite audience members. Thus, by transforming Tzara's nonsense into bilingual exposition and selecting cryptic quotations from Joyce and Lenin, Stoppard uses his verbal games in conjunction with his visual effects to reduce the significance of the political and aesthetic differences the characters will argue about so vehemently as the play proceeds. Underneath the narcissism of their minor differences lies the basic sameness of all writing-- it is always a kind of cut and paste job, and authorial intent is always open to subversion as readers and audiences may or may not supply the expected context.

The process of writing is further demystified as Henry Carr takes over the scene (which has all taken place inside his senile mind) and begins orally "writing" his memoirs of Zurich during the Great War. For the record,

Lenin, Joyce, and Tzara were in fact all in Zurich during some part of World War I, and Carr, a minor British consular official, did cross paths with James Joyce when Carr agreed to play Algernon in a performance of The Importance of Being Earnest that Joyce managed. Unfortunately, Carr and Joyce quarrelled over the financial arrangements and ended up going to court, amidst Joyce's insistence that Carr had slandered him. As Stoppard explains, "Joyce won on the money and lost on the slander, but he reserved his full retribution for Ulysses," (p. 12) in which Carr becomes a drunken soldier in the "circe" episode. Carr apparently did not know Lenin or Tzara, but this fact does not deter him in the least from including them in his memoirs, for Carr is not notably concerned with the distinction between fact and fiction. What is most remarkable about Carr's narrative bridge, however, is not so much its creative blending of reality and fancy, but its uncannily accurate representation of the act of writing. Carr's confused ramblings remind any writer of any persuasion of the series of drafts that are only too familiar. We have to laugh as we see the private tricks of the trade unveiled on stage, for as Carr starts a draft and stops in frustration, and then starts again on a new sheet of paper, he saves the best phrases and rhetorical strategies from his previous attempts, even though his ostensible subject changes from "Memories of James Joyce" (p. 22) to "Lenin as I Knew Him"

(p. 23) to "Street of Revolution!" (p. 24) to "Memories of Data by a Consular Friend of the Famous in Old Zurich: A Sketch" (p. 25).

Thus, while Carr may readily abandon the topic of Joyce to begin a sketch of Lenin, he is much less willing to throw out his favorite lines. He recycles one of his Joyce openers, "To those of us who knew him, Joyce's genius was never in doubt" (p. 22) for his portrait of Lenin: "To those of us who knew him, Lenin's greatness was never in doubt" (p. 24). He describes Joyce as "a complex personality, an enigma" (p. 23) and asserts that "To be in his presence was to be aware of an amazing intellect bent on shaping itself into the permanent form of its own monument--the book the world now knows as Ulysses!" (p. 22). After declaring Joyce "not worth the paper" (p. 23), Carr reassembles the scraps, adds a bit of alliterative embellishment, and pulls out of his hat this description of Lenin: "To be in his presence was to be aware of a complex personality, enigmatic, magnetic, but not, I think, astigmatic" (p. 23), and furthermore, a man "bent [. . .] on the seemingly impossible task of reshaping the civilised world into a federation of standing committees of workers' deputies" (p. 23). And Stoppard recycles his own favorite Beckett joke as he has Carr qualify his assertions about Joyce to the point of negation--and then reapply the same formula to Lenin. One moment, Carr describes Joyce as "exhibiting a monkish

unconcern for worldly and bodily comforts" (p. 23), but in the same breath, he declares that Joyce was not given to "shutting himself off from the richness of human society" (p. 23). Lenin is likewise both "an essentially simple man, and yet an intellectual theoretician" (p. 23).

As we observe Carr struggling to get the words right, we laugh not only at his bungled attempts and the obvious absence of veracity, but at the defrocking of the romantic conception of writing as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquility."³⁷ For Carr, no less than for the three famous authors, or for any of us, writing is not notably tranquil or spontaneous. It seems less a matter of recording "powerful feelings" than of assembling the right words into the right rhetorical strategies--Carr, after all, fails most miserably and must begin again whenever he actually recollects how much he hated Joyce and resented Lenin's escape from Zurich. And inasmuch as Carr's memoir writing demonstrates the triumph of form over content, it also serves as both a subtle tribute and an introduction to Oscar Wilde, whose The Importance of Being Earnest is just about to take over the structure of Travesties via Carr's recollection of his personal triumph "in the demanding role of Ernest (not Ernest, the other one)--" (p. 25).

Gold sees an inverted relationship between Travesties and Earnest, observing that Wilde

wrote a play as deliberately emptied of content--politically, emotionally, and philosophically--as can be imagined, and while he was engaged in making light of most of the sacraments and almost every bourgeois notion of seriousness, he called his play The Importance of Being Earnest. Stoppard, on the other hand, has written a play called Travesties and filled it with serious matter.³⁸

If we take this observation one step further, however, we see that this relationship is inverted again so that the first half of the play firmly supports Gwendolen's contention in Earnest that "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing."³⁹ The opening movement in particular is "as deliberately emptied of content--politically, emotionally, and philosophically--as can be imagined," in spite of the fact that it purportedly portrays Lenin, Loyce, and Tzara working away on germinal writings of the modern era. Whitaker notes that W.H. Auden "once called The Importance of Being Earnest 'perhaps the only purely verbal opera in English'";⁴⁰ obviously, Auden had not seen Travesties, for even more than the parent play, it calls our attention to language and style to such an extent that the "serious matter" becomes incidental to the verbal play.

After Carr's narrative bridge subsides to make way for more dramatic action, the play of language and styles continues, though it is now more firmly grounded in a context. That context, however, is anything but simple. For now Act One of Earnest is providing the basic structure as

Carr relives his stellar performance as Algernon, while his manservant Bennett assumes the role of Lane, Tzara becomes Jack, and Joyce (christened James Augusta) plays Algy's Aunt Augusta, Lady Bracknell. As if this were not enough complexity for one act, Bennett's exposition has a Brechtian flavor in its didacticism (we later learn from Cecily that Bennett "has radical sympathies" (p. 73)), and "the political debates . . . have an unmistakably Shavian crackle."⁴¹ Joyce's interview of Tzara travesties "the 'handbag' interview in Wilde and also the dry catechetical tone of the penultimate section (Ithaca) of Ulysses,"⁴² and one scene is written entirely in limericks. Carr's memory, meanwhile, has not improved, so "The story (like a toy train perhaps) occasionally jumps the rails and has to be restarted at the point where it goes wild" (p. 27). Added to this trademark Stoppardian pastiche are equally trademark Stoppardian word games. The verbal games, delightful in themselves, also work to sustain the effect of the opening scene; that is, until Joyce overwhelms the play near the end of the first act, the dance of styles brings the characters together, undermining their differences and providing them with a common idiom.

The Earnest segment opens as Carr takes off the hat and dressing gown of Old Carr and modulates his voice to that of the Young Carr of 1917. Bennett enters with the tray of tea and sandwiches, à la Earnest, and after Carr

delivers some well-phrased clichés about the neutrality and punctuality of Switzerland, Bennett ventures beyond a simple "Yes, sir" (p. 26) to inform Carr, for the first of five times: "I have put the newspapers and telegrams on the sideboard, sir" (p. 26). Carr responds in turn with the question he will repeat five times as his toy train jumps its tracks: "Is there anything of interest?" (p. 26). Bennett's summary of the news stylishly embodies the general strategy of contradiction Stoppard envisioned for the play as a whole. As he explained to Hayman, in Travesties "what I'm always trying to say is 'Firstly, A. Secondly, minus A.'"⁴³ Bennett gives us A and minus A in the same elegant, Wildean sentence: "The Neue Zuricher Zeitung and the Zuricher Post announce, respectively, an important Allied and German victory, each side gaining ground after inflicting heavy casualties on the other side with little loss to itself" (p. 26). Of course, Bennett's news report also contains the essence of another related Travesties theme, that historical fact depends as much on the observer as on the events observed, or, simply, that Truth is relative.

Carr's response to Bennett's rhetorically polished war report is a most un-Wildean emotional outburst filled with dashes, fragments, and exclamation points: "Never in the whole history of human conflict was there anything to match the carnage--God's blood! the shot and shell!--grave-yard stench!--Christ Jesu!--deserted by simpletons, they

damn us to hell-*ora pro nobis*--quick! no, get me out!" (p. 27). Nor is this the end of his outburst, for he goes straight into a description of the clothes he plans to wear that evening to the theater. As in his opening memoir writing, topics may come and go, but style is decidedly more permanent: Cooke observes that "Carr (or rather Stoppard) uses an almost identical pattern of sounds (much like Tzara's dadaist poem which opens the play) to convey an entirely different meaning."⁴⁴ Carr's "I think to match the carnation, oxblood shot-silk cravat, starched, creased just so" (p. 27) repeats the sounds of his "anything to match the carnage--God's blood! the shot and shell!--graveyard stench!--Christ Jesu!" (p. 27), just as "asserted by a simple pin, the damask lapels--or a brown, no, biscuit--no --get me out [.] . ." (p. 27) is patterned after "--deserted by simpletons, they damn us to hell--*ora pro nobis*--quick! no, get me out!" (p. 27). As Cooke explains (with less than perfect clarity), "This is more than simply an elaborate pun,"⁴⁵ for "like Tzara's passage, the verbal 'facts' have no meaning in themselves but two meanings when perceived in context."⁴⁶ Furthermore, he argues, "the meanings themselves reinforce the idea that the reality of events in the objective world (the war) is a creation of the subjective self (clothing),"⁴⁷ for "Here Carr's aesthetics literally shapes his vision of war."⁴⁸ In other words, Carr's chaotic tirade makes the same point that Bennett's

elegant news report made, namely, that the reality of the war depends on the interpretation of the observer.

But we recognize in Carr's Dadaist outburst a continuation of the strategy of the opening scene. Although Carr and Tzara are headed for a stormy confrontation, mainly about style, Stoppard defuses the impact of their dispute with his own stylistic games. While Carr is "au fond a bourgeois, Wilde's favorite target,"⁴⁹ and a philistine who detests Dadaist nonsense, his outburst is very much Dadaist nonsense--like Tzara's opening poem, it depends on "chance" sound qualities rather than substance. This stylistic game includes Bennett as well, for although Carr's servant "has radical sympathies" (p. 73), the style of his speech is drawn from the gentlemanly banter of Earnest. Until the play changes course with Joyce's triumphant speech, all of its characters are brought together in this game of styles--all except Lenin and his wife, who are banished after the opening library scene to reappear only in Act Two, when their stylistic consistency will work to highlight the substantive contradictions in Lenin's doctrine.

When Carr and Bennett begin the sequence again, Carr is under control and back into character--the character of Algernon, or perhaps Wilde himself. His character note, an excessive interest in clothing, marks him as a Wildean Dandy and underscores his preference for style over substance. And when his lines are not directly borrowed from

Earnest, they retain both Wilde's rhythms and his characteristic inverted clichés. Meanwhile, throughout the remaining four versions of Travesties' renditions of the opening scene of Earnest, Bennett modulates seamlessly from the Wildean mode to the Brechtian mode and back again. He plays Lane respectfully accouncing that Mr. Tzara called while also summarizing the newspaper reports on the progress of the Russian Revolution. As Whitaker notes, "Bennett's reports on current politics"⁵⁰ foreshadow Cecily's "sober lecture on the history of Marxism"⁵¹ which opens Act Two. But Bennett's exposition is mercifully saved from the deadeningly dull earnestness of Cecily's lecture by Stoppard's delightful exploitation of the comic potential of the scene. We are always amused by the stock device of the learned servant teaching the stupid master, but doubly so here because the topic is--of all things--the class war. And Stoppard carries the joke one step further in this scene as he undermines even the stupid-master/learned-servant device through brilliant exploitation of the clashing of the comic and epic modes. Carr may play the dense master being taught by his well-informed and articulate servant, but his comic frame contains and neutralizes the radical content of Bennett's polished Brechtian speeches.

The combination of the two modes leads to repeated dislocations which are unfailingly funny and often thought-provoking. After Bennett explains with aplomb both "the

process of dialectical materialism" (p. 30) and the Soviet stance that the war is merely an "imperialist adventure carried on at the expense of workers of both sides" (p. 31), he observes that the Soviet term for those participating in the war--"lickspittle capitalist manservant'" (p. 31)--is "unnecessarily offensive in my view" (p. 31). At the surface level, Carr seems to miss completely the chance to coopt Bennett, but his reply, "I'm not sure that I'm much interested in your views, Bennett--" (p. 31), while discouraging his servant's budding bourgeois leanings, does coopt Bennett back into the comic mode, where he meekly returns to his subservient demeanor. Like Lane who once apologized for offering his solicited views on marriage (only to be told by Algy, "I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane"⁵²), Bennett now apologizes for having offered his views on politics--"They're not particularly interesting, sir" (p. 31). But without missing a beat, Bennett drops back into the Brechtian mode and explains "the Bolshevik line" (p. 31) that "some unspecified but unique property of the Russian situation, unforeseen by Marx, has caused the bourgeois-capitalist era of Russian history to be compressed into the last few days, and that the time for the proletarian revolution is now ripe" (p. 31).

As the scene shuttles back and forth from the comic mode to the Brechtian mode, Bennett undoubtedly gets the

best lines, but Carr manages to retain his position of social superiority, even while being taught about the class war, by maintaining the comic frame of Earnest. And if Bennett reveals a certain lack of awareness by addressing Carr as "sir" while he is explaining central tenets of Marxism, Carr equals him by remaining oblivious to the Dadaist tendencies in his own style. Some moments after his associative outburst about the war and his evening clothes, Carr scolds Bennett for following his mention of "spies, counterspies, radicals, artists, and riff-raff of all kinds" (p. 30) with a second announcement that "Mr. Tzara called, sir" (p. 30). Now safely back into the role of Algernon, Carr reprimands Bennett for "taking up this modish novelty of 'free association'" (p. 30). The time for the first politico-aesthetic clash is now ripe, for Carr, who freely associates while disapproving of free association, is about to receive the prime advocate of the practice.

In lines borrowed straight from Earnest, Bennett announces "Mr. Tzara" (p. 32), and Carr receives Tzara as Algernon had received Jack. This Tzara is, as Stoppard specifies, "a Rumanian nonsense" (p. 32), and he speaks Jack's lines with a ridiculous foreign accent," "Plaizure, plaizure! What else? Eating ez usual I see 'Enri?!" (p. 32), he replies to Carr's query about what brings him for a visit. He has just enough time to express his hope that the guests indicated by the tea service include

Gwendolen I hopp!--I luff 'er, 'Enri" (p. 32)--before Bennett announces the arrival of "Miss Gwendolen and Mr. Joyce" (p. 32). Tzara's silly Rumanian accent is topped by Joyce's speech, which is entirely in limericks. In fact, Joyce's presence is so imposing, partly because he is destined to play Lady Bracknell when he returns in the third version of this scene from Earnest and partly, I suspect, as an early warning sign that he is going to commandeer the play upon his return, that all the dialogue among the four is in limerick form. This manic scene manages to introduce Joyce as "A fine writer who writes caviar / for the general, hence poor--" (p. 33), a description borrowed from Hamlet,⁵³ and Tzara as an artist who "writes poetry and sculpts, / with quite unexpected results" (p. 34), as well as bringing up the topic of the play Joyce wants to put on, the play we have, in effect, been watching for some time now. The scene degenerates into a quadrilingual good-bye, "Avanti! Gut'n tag! Adios! Au revoir! Vamanos!" (p. 33), echoing the quadrilingual apology of the opening library scene, before Carr signals its end by starting his memoirs, and the scene, over again with, "Well, let us resume. Zurich by One Who Was There" (p. 36).

After Bennett reinitiates the sequence by again announcing the arrival of "Mr. Tzara" (p. 36), "TZARA, no less than CARR, is straight out of The Importance of Being Earnest" (p. 36). Stoppard continues the strategy of

undermining the differences between his characters by giving them a common language, a common style. But Tzara is not simply coopted into the witty banter of Earnest; Carr unknowingly reciprocates by falling back into Dadaist free association. Annoyed by Tzara's observation that he is "eating and drinking, as usual" (p. 36), Carr responds "stiffly," "I believe it is done to drink a glass of hock and seltzer before luncheon" (p. 36) because drinking hock makes one "feel much better after it" (p. 36). Tzara, suspicious of the very concept of cause and effect, suggests that Carr "might have felt much better anyway" (p. 36). Carr predictably insists on a causal relationship, but the form of his reply so thoroughly undermines its surface message that his would-be rebuttal to Dadaism supports the same principles he seeks to refute. "No, no--post hock, propter hock" (p. 36), he argues, again relying on "chance" association of sounds, even though he thinks himself opposed to this "modish novelty" (p. 30). And, of course, the Latin phrase he refers to, "posthoc, ergo propter hoc," is itself a catch-phrase which designates the fallacy of assuming a cause and effect relationship when only a temporal relationship exists.

Instead of seizing the opportunity to point out that Carr's apparent defense of causality ultimately demonstrates Dadaist principles, Tzara takes Carr's statement at face value, and the debate is on: "But, my dear Henry, causality,

[sic] is no longer fashionable owing to the war" (p. 36), he rebuts. Round one features Carr defending the position that the war did in fact have causes against Tzara's insistence that "everything is Chance, including design" (p. 37). Neither debater is notably consistent, and Carr again unwittingly undermines his stance by referring to "chance" sound qualities to support his argument that the war had perfectly logical causes. He believes that it was caused by "something about brave little Belgium" (p. 36), but Tzara (undermining his own position) names Serbia as the cause. Carr rejects the Serbian explanation, not because his understanding of recent history differs from Tzara's, but because "The newspapers would never have risked calling the British public to arms without a proper regard for succinct alliteration" (pp. 36-37). Here, as in earlier segments, Carr's dandyish preference for style over substance coincides with his habit of privileging sound over sense, which has become the mark of Dadaism through Stoppard's transforming word-play. Carr is spared from humiliating defeat in this debate only by Tzara's own remarkable inconsistency: the apostle of nonsense as the salvation of the world dismisses Carr's unreasonable reasoning with, "Oh, what nonsense you talk" (p. 37).

Round two begins after Tzara repeats "Dada" thirty-four times and Carr returns Tzara's insult: "Oh, what nonsense you talk" (p. 37). Carr tries to salvage some credibility

by reminding his opponent, "I was there, in the mud and blood of foreign field, unmatched in the whole history of human carnage" (p. 37). If the words have a familiar ring, it is because they initiated his outburst in the "newspapers and telegrams" sequence. And as before, the words trigger some association with clothing. "Ruined several pairs of trousers" (p. 37), Carr continues, and then catalogues the "twill jodphurs with pigskin straps" (p. 37), "the sixteen ounce serge, the heavy worsted, the silk flannel mixture" (p. 37), and so on until Tzara, the Dada of free association, must bring him back to the point at hand. Tzara suggests that Carr could have spared himself the agony of ruining so many irreplaceable pairs of trousers by spending "the time in Switzerland as an artist" (p. 38), and with this remark, the debate expands to include the political responsibilities of artists. Carr reveals a love-hate attitude toward artists, insisting first that they are unspeakably self-centered--"To be an artist in Zurich, in 1917, implies a degree of self-absorption that would have glazed over the eyes of Narcissus" (p. 38)--and then that they are "gifted in some way that enables [them] to do something more or less well which can only be done badly or not at all by someone who is not thus gifted" (p. 38). Lacking these gifts, Carr declares, "I couldn't be an artist anywhere--I can do none of the things by which is meant art" (p. 38). When Tzara reassures him that "Art is

no longer considered the proper concern of the artist[. . . .] He may be a poet by drawing words out of a hat" (p. 38), Carr fails to recognize that he has been functioning as a poet, in Dadaist terms, since the beginning of the play. "But that is simply to change the meaning of the word Art" (p. 38), he counters, before declaring all such redefinitions irresponsible. Tzara's reply--"You do exactly the same thing with words like patriotism, duty, love, freedom, kind and country, brave little Belgium, saucy little Serbia" (p. 39)--wins him both debating points, and as Whitaker argues, audience sympathy.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the debate must ultimately be declared a draw, for neither Carr nor Tzara emerges as a clear-cut winner, as the voice of Truth, and the lack of resolution stems at least as much from the form of their arguments as from the substance. We may be swayed both by Carr's argument that "modern art" (p. 39) is often a product of "loss of nerve and failure of talent" (p. 39) and by Tzara's rejection of the traditional "sophistry that sanctifies mass murder with the rhetoric of 'patriotism, duty, love, freedom',"⁵⁵ but our ambivalence, even confusion, is fostered by the characters' consistent stylistic inconsistency. Tzara relies heavily on cause and effect to support his arguments against causality, and while declaring himself opposed to artistic tradition, he participates freely in "that quintessential English jewel" (p. 51), Earnest. And

Carr, of course, repeatedly adopts the style of free association Tzara advocates, even while arguing against Dadaism. This constant switching to the style and rhetorical strategy of the opponent so thoroughly undercuts the substance of their arguments that it seems perfectly appropriate for the scene to end as Carr finishes Tzara's sentence, "Or, to put it another way--" (p. 40) with the chant, "We're here because we're here . . . because we're here [. . .]" (p. 40). As Werner notes, "Carr's droning repetition of the phrases . . . seems as meaningless as a Dadaist chant,"⁵⁶ and in fact, Tzara accompanies Carr's droning by chanting "'da-da' to the same tune" (p. 40).

When the lights return to normal after another one of Carr's chaotic outbursts, Carr and Tzara calmly begin the "cucumber sandwiches" sequence of Earnest for the third and last time. This final scene of Travesties' first act is easily the most complex in the play, for it houses the continuation of the contradictory debate between Carr and Tzara as well as the crockery-smashing confrontation between Joyce and Tzara in an elaborate structure built from the first act of Earnest, the "Ithaca" section of Ulysses, tag-lines from various Shakespeare plays, history, and other sources. If, as Werner argues, "Stoppard unveils the limitations of the twentieth century's most cherished systems of belief"⁵⁷ in Travesties, he also, as Hinden argues, begins "siding with Joyce on major issues"⁵⁸ in this sequence. Joyce may suffer

some personal attacks--he is repeatedly shown trying to remedy his penniless state by arranging permanent loans, and his uncoordinated suit attracts much criticism--but his qualifications as an artist are never successfully challenged. Meanwhile, Tzara discredits his own position by remaining as inconsistent as ever, but he emerges from inconsistency long enough to begin the assault on Lenin by pointing, quite accurately, to "the contradiction of the radical movement" (p. 46), the bourgeois artistic tastes of political revolutionaries like Lenin. Thus, although the first act's final scene retains the stylistic complexity of earlier segments, the stylistic continuity belies the drastic change of course contained within the scene, for well before Cecily's unmercifully dull speech opens Act Two, Travesties moves decisively toward a solid endorsement of Joyce and an almost equally unambiguous condemnation of Lenin.

The sequence opens with Wildean banter which furthers Wilde's plot line, for it reintroduces Cecily, the librarianship of Zurich, with whom Carr will fall in love to provide the requisite second pair of lovers (Tzara has, of course, already professed his love for Gwendolen). Cecily serves another function as well, though, for when she is not helping Lenin assemble economic facts for his work on imperialism, "she is working her way along the shelves" (p. 42), reading "the poets, as indeed everything else" (p. 42) in alphabetical order. Cecily's unusual method of acquiring

and ordering knowledge provides the basis for a series of quick jokes--Tzara's mention of "Zimmerwaldists" (p. 45), for example, prompts Carr to comment, "That sounds like the last word in revolutionary politics" (p. 45)--but it also highlights a central Travesties theme, namely, as Cooke explains, that "Form--arrangement, order, context--creates meaning."⁵⁹ Her method of assembling facts is even more arbitrary than the methods used by Lenin, Joyce, and even Tzara, and its very arbitrariness calls attention to the point made by both the structure and content of Travesties, that form and context are the creators of meaning.

With the mention of the Zurich Public Library, Tzara brings up the topic of Joyce, and after explaining how the Irish writer came to be living in Zurich, he embarks on a contradictory condemnation of the man from Dublin. He first slurs Joyce for wearing "the mismatched halves of sundry sundered Sunday suits" (p. 42), suits he describes in such detail that he sounds like Carr cataloguing the trousers he ruined in the trenches. Then, he condemns Joyce's art as "reeking of old hat, being second-hand fin-de-siècle slop" (p. 42). Tzara's inconsistency blares at us--for who is a Dadaist to complain about an author's drawing second-hand material out of a hat?--but he goes on to explain the crux of his criticism, which, if anything, makes his position even more shaky. The most serious flaw he finds in Joyce's poems is that they are "hardly likely to start a revolution"

(p. 42). With perfect inconsistency, then, Tzara claims that his cut and paste method spurs revolution, but when another author cuts and pastes without bothering to announce that the proletarian revolt is at hand, Tzara simply pronounces the writing bad.

Oddly enough, it is Carr who comes to Joyce's defense when Tzara continues his condemnation by observing that Joyce's helper, Gwendolen, "is so innocent she does not stop to wonder what possible book could be derived from reference to Homer's Odyssey and the Dublin Street Directory for 1904" (p. 44). For once, Carr expresses an inkling of appreciation for the method of writing that he happens to use as well. "I admit it's an unusual combination of sources, but not wholly without possibilities" (p. 44), he retorts. Carr's own combination of sources, The Importance of Being Earnest and the history of ideas in Zurich during World War I, is also unusual, but, as Travesties has shown, not wholly without possibilities.

Rather than lingering on this point, however, the pair modulates immediately to the cigarette case encounter between Jack and Algernon in Earnest. This time, the lost and found item is a library card belonging to Tristan Tzara, but "made out in the name of Mr. Jack Tzara" (p. 44). As Tzara explains, his "name is Tristan in the Meirei Bar and Jack in the library" (p. 45) because he does not want his library companions, especially Lenin, to know that he is

the Dadaist, Tristan Tzara. Algernon's line from the cigarette case scene in Earnest, "The truth is rarely pure and never simple,"⁶⁰ though never stated, lurks in the background of Tzara's convoluted explanation of his dual identity. He explains, in a story we will hear again as Lenin is firmly discredited in Act Two, that as "Lenin was raging against the chauvinist moderates who didn't necessarily want to bayonet every man over the rank of NCO" (p. 45), "someone at the bar piano started to play a Beethoven sonata" (p. 45). In Tzara's view, Beethoven is part of the tradition of Western culture which created World War I: "The classics--tradition--vomit on it! [. . .] Beethoven! Mozart! I spit on it!" (p. 35), he proclaimed in the manic limerick scene. But Lenin, in the midst of declaring all participation in the war just cause for execution, "went completely to pieces" (p. 45) upon hearing the sonata, "and when he recovered he dried his eyes and lashed into the Dadaists, if you please" (p. 45).

For Tzara, this cafe scene embodies "the contradiction of the radical movement" (p. 46) because, he explains, "as a Dadaist myself I am the natural enemy of bourgeois art and the natural ally of the political left, but the odd thing about revolution is that the further left you go politically the more bourgeois they like their art" (p. 45). As anyone who has ever suffered through an exhibition of socialist realistic art knows, there is more than a grain

of truth in Tzara's observation. But Travesties is still in the playful mode, still refraining from presenting its own unqualified version of Truth, and Tzara's comments on this apparent contradiction are not allowed to stand unfuted. Carr responds with a counter-argument which is at least as convincing as the one put forth by Tzara. "There is nothing contradictory about it . . ." (p. 46), Carr replies, because "Revolution in art is in no way connected with class revolution" (p. 46). He maintains that "Artists are members of a privileged class" (p. 46) and that "Art is absurdly overrated" (p. 46) not only by artists but by everyone else as well. Carr's argument culminates in an impassioned speech directly borrowed from Artist Descending a Staircase,⁶¹ Stoppard's 1972 radio play which also explores the relationship between art and politics: "For every thousand people there's nine hundred doing the work, ninety doing well, nine doing good, and one lucky bastard who's the artist" (p. 46). When Hayman asked Stoppard about using identical arguments in the two plays, Stoppard replied simply, "If it's worth using once, it's worth using twice."⁶² Obviously, the argument appeals to Stoppard, as it inevitably appeals to an audience comprised mainly of the "nine hundred doing the work" (p. 46).

This dizzying, dislocating debate achieves new heights of contradiction when Tzara, after repeatedly declaring that anyone, no matter how untalented, is capable of being

an artist, insists, quite literally, that artists are sacred. "When the strongest began to fight for the tribe, and the fastest to hunt, it was the artist who became the priest-guardian of the magic that conjured the intelligence out of the appetites" (p. 47, italics mine), he heatedly argues. This is, of course, precisely the stance Joyce will espouse in a few moments as he clashes with Tzara, and what is more, Tzara uses terms to describe his position--"magic" and "conjure"--which are identical to the ones Joyce will use so effectively. Tzara's praise for the sacred artist's abilities to conjure "the intelligence out of the appetites" (p. 47) absolutely defies his Dadaist desire "to make the point that making poetry should be as natural as making water" (p. 62). In spite of his professed radicalness, he falls back on the traditional line that culture ("intelligence") is superior to nature ("the appetites").

Just when the intensity of this politico-aesthetic debate has become almost overwhelming, Stoppard gives us a welcome respite as Bennett again announces the arrival of "Miss Gwendolen and Mr. Joyce" (p. 47). On this cue, the play drops back to a slower pace as it averts its attention temporarily from the intellectual conundrum which has developed to attend to the necessities of plot. In relatively straightforward fashion, Joyce announces that he is mounting a play and requests Carr's official support. He then explains that if his "name is in bad odour among the

British community in Zurich" (p. 49), perhaps it is because of his pacifist poem, "Mr. Dooley." But nothing in the plot requires that Joyce then recite all twenty-one lines of this remarkably pedestrian poem, which is exactly what he does.

The pace picks up only slightly after slowing to a near halt during "Mr. Dooley," for as Joyce asks Carr to play the leading role in his production of Earnest, the two remain comfortably in their dominant personae, and the dialogue is thus rather straightforward. Joyce asks for "a couple of pounds" (p. 50) and then begins to persuade Carr to play Algernon by presenting Zurich as "the theatrical centre of Europe" (p. 51) where "culture is the continuation of war by other means" (p. 51). This appeal to Carr's patriotic duty piques the consular official's interest, and Joyce's mention of "a repertoire of masterpieces" (p. 51) brings out the philistine in Carr, who suggests "Gilbert and Sullivan" (p. 51) or perhaps "Pirates of Penzance!" (p. 51). Ultimately Carr accepts the role after hearing the details of the stylish costumes the part requires, and Carr and Joyce retire to discuss the play, as Algernon and Lady Bracknell had retired to discuss music, leaving Gwendolen and Jack/Tzara alone to form a romantic alliance.

With the exits of Carr and Joyce, the slow paced lull gives way to one of the play's most amazing demonstrations of the potential of collage. Tzara's profession of love

for Gwendolen commences as "TZARA comes forward with rare diffidence, holding a hat like a brimming bowl. It transpires that he has written down a Shakespeare sonnet and cut it up into single words which he has placed in the hat" (p. 53). Gwendolen observes that Tzara's "technique is unusual" (p. 53), but Tzara insists that "All poetry is a reshuffling of a pack of picture cards" (p. 53), a claim that certainly seems valid in light of the opening library sequence and, indeed, the whole structure of Travesties. Tzara, however, then asserts that "all poets are cheats" (p. 53). If borrowing is cheating, Stoppard is about to cheat extravagantly, for the entire ensuing conversation between Gwendolen and Tzara is composed of famous lines from numerous Shakespeare plays and the thirty-second sonnet. Upon learning that the hat contains scraps of the eighteenth sonnet, Gwendolen recites the lovely poem, and then asks, "You tear him for his bad verses?" (p. 54), a familiar query which now enjoys a contextual pun. When she complains, quite justly, "These are but wild and whirling words, my lord" (p. 54), Tzara can only agree, "Ay, madam" (p. 54). Then Gwendolen looks on her would-be lover, the Dadaist poet, and laments, "Truly I wish the gods had made thee poetical" (p. 54), but Tzara must admit, "I was not born under a rhyming planet" (p. 54). Stoppard sustains this wonderful pastiche, this delightful "reshuffling," through eight exchanges of dialogue, and I would venture to guess that few of us feel

cheated by his borrowing. To the contrary, this sequence is perhaps his most eloquent and impressive testimony in defense of his method.

Whitaker accurately observes that the dialogue between Tzara and Gwendolen prepares us "to see a collaborative meaning emerge once more from random bits and pieces"⁶³ when Gwendolen finally pulls the scraps of the sonnet from Tzara's hat. We are not disappointed, for just as in the opening scene, Tzara's would-be nonsense is transformed by Stoppard's games into a poem appropriate to the context. Tzara had explained when he offered the scraps to Gwendolen that they come "from the well-spring where my atoms are uniquely organized" (p. 53), which is presumably a decidedly unromantic way of saying that the resulting poem will be an expression of love uniquely his own. The "random" words do express a desire, for, as Whitaker notes, "they have become a free-verse poem of unmistakably phallic excitement,"⁶⁴ and poor Gwendolen blushes to read, "see, this lovely hot possession growest / so long / by nature's course-- / so . . . long--heaven!" (p. 54). Happily for Gwendolen, when Tzara takes over the task of pulling the words out of the hat, the temperature of the poem drops to innocuous observations about the weather--"summer changing, more temperate complexion . . ." (p. 55)--and the pair modulates easily to the Earnest frame as Gwendolen repeats her lines from Wilde, "Pray don't talk to me about the

weather, Mr. Tzara. Whenever people talk to me about the weather I always feel quite certain that they mean something else" (p. 55).

The new lovers move quickly through the motions of confirming their mutual admiration, but the rules of comedy require an obstacle which blocks the full realization of the union until the play's end. As in *Earnest*, the obstacle is two-fold. In place of the "insuperable barrier"⁶⁵ of "Christian names"⁶⁶ which deters Gwendolen and Cecily in Wilde's play, the first obstacle in *Travesties* depends on whether Tzara shares Gwendolen's "regard for Mr. Joyce as an artist" (p. 55). To test their aesthetic compatibility, Gwendolen gives Tzara a folder which she assumes contains the manuscript of "The Oxen in the Sun" chapter from *Ulysses*, but which in fact, due to an accidental swapping of folders in the opening scene, contains a chapter from Lenin's work on imperialism. They have no time to discover the mistake (discovery must, of comic necessity, wait until the final scene anyway) because Joyce reenters just as the lovers are embracing to provide the second obstacle: Lady Bracknell. Joyce booms, "Rise, sir, from that semi-recumbent posture!" (p. 55), grabs his scrap-filled hat, and exits in righteous indignation.

When Joyce, now "covered from head to breast in little bits of white paper" (p. 56), reenters to question Tzara, we witness the apparent continuation of the scene in the

same impressive collage-style, for Joyce interviews Tzara as Lady Bracknell had interviewed Jack, but in place of Wilde's witty wackiness, the questions and answer resemble Joyce's dry catechism in the "Ithaca" chapter of Ulysses while at the same time suggesting Brechtian didacticism, especially when Tzara incorporates quoted material into his answers. As in the opening library scene, Stoppard plays with the visual dimension and with the actual content of the dialogue to complete his tri-level tribute to collage. Throughout the interview, Joyce picks the "bits of paper from his hair and from his clothing" (p. 60) and replaces "each bit in his hat" (p. 60); he will perform visual magic tricks with the scraps at the end of the scene--voilà, a carnation and a rabbit--much as we know he performed a verbal magic trick with the scraps from the opening scene--voilà, "The Oxen in the Sun." The content adds the third dimension, for in the midst of all the borrowing of styles and conjuring from scraps, Joyce and Tzara intersperse in their discussion of Dadaist methods of composition repeated references to the problem of copyrights. The concept of authorship as exclusive ownership has probably never seemed more bizarre, more completely invalid, than it does in this context.

Thus, the scene seems in every way a seamless continuation of what has preceded it--the stylistic density is sustained, scraps continue as a visual motif, and the

traditional model of authorship remains under fire. But subtly, almost imperceptibly, Travesties is radically shifting course, for in place of the general unmasking of the traditional concept of authorship, the interview moves toward an increasingly specific critique of the inconsistencies in the Dadaist attempt to revise it. But instead of simply unveiling the limitations of Dadaism, this scene awards every one of Tzara's lost debating points to Joyce. The interview opens with matter-of-fact questions and answers which provide an informative, if dry, summary of the founding of Dadaism by Hans, or Jean, Arp whose "duplicate" (p. 57) name is the result of Arp's being "a native of Alsace, of French background, and a German citizen by virtue of the conquest of 1879" (p. 57). But as information about Hugo Ball, another founder of Dadaism, is presented in the form of quotes from Ball's diary, the partisan attack on Dadaism begins as Stoppard has Joyce explore the irony of a Dadaist's asserting copyrights.

Upon learning that Ball's diary is not "in the public domain by virtue of the expiration of copyright protection as defined by the Berne convention of 1886" (p. 58), Joyce instructs Tzara to "Quote judiciously so as to combine maximum information with minimum liability" (p. 58), and then again, to "Quote discriminately from Ball's diary in such a manner as to avoid forfeiting the goodwill of his executors" (p. 58). Tzara obliges by doing his best to

avoid violating Dadaist Father Ball's ownership rights while also borrowing from Ball's diary to explain the founder's advocacy of borrowing indiscriminately to produce new writing. While we may be obliged, in turn, to wonder who owns the words from Ball's diary which Tzara quotes in Stoppard's play, we are undoubtedly most struck by the absurdity of a Dadaist's even bothering to claim copyright protection. And the Dadaists sound ever more like a silly lot of quacks as Tzara answers Joyce's query about the relative merits of hats and coats as sources of Dadaist art with the dry and untheoretical explanation that coats are "Inferior to a hat in regard to the tendency of one or both sleeves to hang down in front of the eyes, with the resultant possibility of the wearer falling off the edge of the platform" (p. 59), but "Superior to a hat in regard to the number of its pockets" (p. 59). Tzara continues to "Corroborate discreetly from any contemporary diarist whose estate is not given to obsessive litigation over trivial infringement of copyright" (p. 59) at Joyce's command, all the while showing no sign of recognizing the irony of his position. He offers a fact-filled diary quote followed by his own recollection "of what was declaimed synchronously" (p. 59) on the evening of March 30, 1916:

I began, "Boum boum boum il déshabille sa chair quand les grenouilles [. . .]" Huelsenbeck began, "Ahoi ahoi des admirals gwirktes Beinkleid [. . .]" Janco chanted, "I can hear the whip o'will around the hill at five o'clock[. . .]" The title of the poem was "Admiral Seeks House To Let." (pp. 59-60)

The title may now be Travesties instead of "Admiral Seeks House To Let," and we may now have simultaneous literary styles rather than simultaneous languages, but what we have just witnessed is nevertheless a brilliant simulacrum of the Dadaist performance described in the interview.

But before we can take our hats off to Tzara to acknowledge this apparent tribute to Dadaism, Joyce has a few hat tricks of his own which visually underscore a point which has been lying in wait all along: the scraps of Dadaist destruction have meaning and value only "because Stoppard has transformed them with Joycean word-play."⁶⁷ As the idiom slips firmly back into Joyce's "Ithaca" mode (the Brechtian-style quotations are now dropped), Joyce asks, "Is it the case that within a remarkably short time performances of this kind made Dada in general and Tzara in particular names to conjure with wherever art was discussed?" (p. 60) and then casually, on the word "conjure," "he conjures from the hat a white carnation, apparently made from the bits of paper" (p. 60). The moral is already clear--anybody with a pair of scissors can cut, but it takes a real artist to perform the magic of pasting. Instead of the familiar persuasive counterargument we have come to expect from Stoppard, we witness a series of debilitating blows to Tzara. First, Joyce "tosses the carnation at TZARA" (p. 60)--no subtlety in that insult--and then asks, "How would you describe this triumph?" (p. 60). At the

verbal level the question refers to the renown Dadaism has achieved, but at the visual level, of course, it refers to Joyce's triumphant carnation, which Tzara is "putting [. . .] into his buttonhole" (p. 60) when he offers his reply: "As just and proper. Well merited. An example of enterprise and charm receiving their due" (p. 60). The joke is on Tzara as his words, intended as self-praise, attach themselves instead to Joyce's artwork, now on display in the Dadaist's buttonhole. Joyce proves himself the true "priest-guardian of the magic" (p. 47) of Tzara's hypothetical ancient tribe as he pulls silk hankies, then flags, from the hat, all the while firing incriminating questions at Tzara which undermine the significance of Dadaism. When, for example, Joyce asks what Dada brought to art that had not been previously brought in "Barcelona, New York, Paris, Rome, and St. Petersburg" (p. 60)--he produces a flag to accompany the naming of each city--Tzara can only respond to this impressive wizardry with the decidedly lame answer, "The word Dada" (p. 61). The question and answer session come to an end as Joyce instructs Tzara to "Describe sensibly without self-contradiction" (p. 61) how the word Dada was discovered, an assignment we know to be impossible given Tzara's past inconsistency, and then asks for details on the factional rivalry which plagued the Dadaist movement.

Angry at the steady barrage of attacks, Tzara finally lashes out at Joyce with a string of Irish slurs and then a rebuttal: "You've turned literature into a religion and it's as dead as all the rest, it's an overripe corpse and you're cutting fancy figures at the wake" (p. 62), he charges. Tzara's counterattack undoubtedly contains some truth--Joyce's writing, especially the fancy figures of his Wake, requires the explication of a high priest of modernism much as the Latin Bible required a priest to reveal the mysteries of the Sacred Word in medieval times⁶⁸--but Tzara destroys his credibility as he begins to destroy "whatever crockery is to hand" (p. 62) as well. And as he childishly smashes pots, he unwittingly sets the scene for Joyce's eloquent "broken pots" speech, which more than any other in the play contains the message of Truth.

Joyce begins, "You are an over-excited little man, with a need for self-expression far beyond the scope of your natural gifts" (p. 62), and while "This is not discreditable" (p. 62), "Neither does it make you an artist" (p. 62). These words, like those that follow, are unhampered by stylistic games or any hint of contradiction. Nothing in the preceding scene or in the play as a whole undermines Joyce's speech; unlike most of Act One, this set-piece is an oasis of clear-cut referential language. "An artist is the magician put among men to gratify--capriciously--their urge for immortality" (p. 62), he continues.

Temple and states come and go, but "If there is any meaning in any of it, it is in what survives as art, yes even in the celebration of tyrants, yes even in the celebration of nonentities" (p. 62)--nonentities like Carr, who achieves immortality in both Ulysses and Travesties. Art has no immediate political obligations, Joyce in effect argues; artists may justly celebrate even tyrants if this celebration serves a larger purpose, for "What now of the Trojan War if it had been passed over by the artist's touch?" (p. 62), Joyce asks. "Dust" (p. 62), he answers. "A forgotten expedition prompted by Greek merchants looking for new markets. A minor redistribution of broken pots" (p. 62), he continues, speaking from a stage littered with the broken pots of Dadaist destruction, smashed in an effort aimed at least in part at exposing the evils of capitalism and imperialism, the same economic urges that started the Trojan War. And who is not moved by Joyce's justification of the Trojan War (capitalist motives and all) and of the artist?

But it is we who stand enriched, by a tale of heroes, of a golden apple, a wooden horse, a face that launched a thousand ships--and above all, of Ulysses, the wanderer, the most human, the most complete of all heroes--husband, father, son, lover, farmer, soldier, pacifist, politician, inventor and adventurer. . . ." (p. 62)

Anyone who feels any attachment to the Western tradition, which is roughly everyone who bothered to attend the play, is bound to hear the ring of Truth in Joyce's argument,

which, not coincidentally, is something of an "overdetermined" and eloquent restatement of Stoppard's own justification of art: "Art," he explained in his 1974 "Ambushes" interview, "is important because it provides the moral matrix, the moral sensibility, from which we make our judgments about the world."⁶⁹ And while he acknowledged the "possibility of political art having a political effect in close-up, in specific terms," he added, "though I can't offhand think of an example of it happening."⁷⁰

As critics are quick to point out, Joyce's speech was not even a part of Travesties when rehearsals began; it was "added at [Director] Peter Wood's urging."⁷¹ Werner goes back to a still earlier stage of the play's composition and notes that "Joyce wasn't even in the original plan,"⁷² and he takes this fact as a sign that "Travesties could hardly have been intended as a forum for the propagation of his esthetic message."⁷³ While it is entirely possible that Travesties was not intended as a tribute to Joyce, it is just as clear that that is precisely what it turns out to be. In immediate visual terms, Tzara is reduced to a child throwing a temper tantrum and breaking everything in sight while Joyce is elevated to the ranks of the artist-magician who can transform the broken bits and pieces into whole objects of beauty. But the visual dimension works as a metaphor for their writing and retroactively discredits Tzara. All the makers of meaning were presented as roughly

the same in the opening scene--all composed from scraps, and all their writing needed an audience to provide a proper context to turn the random scraps into meaningful utterances. As Joyce's triumph over Tzara casts its shadow back onto earlier scenes, though, we revise our appreciation of Tzara's brilliant nonsense poems ("Eel ate enormous appletzara" and the reshuffled eighteenth sonnet) and now give credit to Stoppard for Joycean word-play. Tzara, then, is simply a destroyer while Joyce and Stoppard are gifted reassemblers. And from a still more distant perspective, we see the larger equation: Stoppard's whole style in Travesties, his catalogue of styles, his word-play, is a tribute to the word-play and catalogue of style in Ulysses.

Though he hardly needs it, Joyce has the last word as he instructs Tzara, in Bracknellian fashion, "to try and acquire some genius and if possible some subtlety before the season is quite over" (p. 63). With that, he bids the speechless Tzara good morning, "produces a rabbit out of his hat" (p. 63), and exits, "holding the rabbit" (p. 63). While it could be argued that the plot of Earnest requires that Joyce win his bout with Tzara just as Lady Bracknell triumphed in her interview with Jack, it is important to note that Tzara is never allowed an effective rebuttal to Joyce. His earlier attacks on Joyce lacked credibility because of their pervasive contradictions, and his one chance to discredit Joyce in Act Two--Tzara pronounces

that Joyce's writing "is graceless without being random; as a narrative it lacks charm or even vulgarity; as an experience it is like sharing a cell with a fanatic in search of a mania" (p. 96)--is more than a failure because, due to the accidental swapping of folders, Tzara is unwittingly condemning Lenin's work on capitalism instead of Joyce's "Oxen in the Sun" chapter, and poor Tzara, we recall, admires Lenin. In spite of the battering he suffers from Joyce, though, Tzara is not the real loser of Travesties. That dubious honor belongs to Lenin, whose story is about to be told--Carr warns us in his ramblings which end the act, "now I'm on to how I met Lenin and could have changed the course of history etcetera" (p. 64)--in the driest, most unplayful style imaginable. But before the curtain falls on Act One, Carr returns once more to the topic of Joyce and tells how he dreamed he had the Irish writer on the witness stand, "a masterly cross-examination, case nearly won" (p. 65), but when he "flung" (p. 65) the question at Joyce, "'And what did you do in the Great War?'" (p. 65), Joyce answered, "'I wrote Ulysses'[. . . .] 'What did you do?'" (p. 65). Joyce wins in Carr's dream even as he won the actual court case over the money, and even as he wins Travesties.

The audience leaves for intermission with all too few questions to ponder, for in the closing moments of Act One, Travesties has subtly but radically changed course. It

began as an exploration of the limits of competing master narratives, competing versions of Truth, much as Rosencrantz is an exploration of the limits of competing theatrical modes. But while Rosencrantz is able to withhold endorsement of any single mode of representation and thus sustain its questioning of Truth right through to the final curtain, the presence of Joyce simply overwhelms Travesties. If Stoppard's characters can find no effective rebuttal to Joyce, perhaps it is because Stoppard himself can find no effective rebuttal to this imposing Father of modernism--a Father to whom Stoppard owes an obviously large debt.

When the play resumes, it returns to the theme of the folly of Truth, for above all else, Lenin's flaw lies in his steadfast insistence that "Marx had shown the only way forward" (p. 68). But this attempt to undermine the concept of one Truth now has a hollow ring, for it is simply a theme which is no longer supported by a structural ambivalence. Instead of the constantly shifting ground of Rosencrantz, which in effect demonstrates that play goes on in the absence of Truth, Travesties settles on the firm ground of the Joycean vision and simply tells us that Truth is folly. It goes without saying that showing is more aesthetically satisfying than simply telling, but it seems that in this case at least, showing is also more politically effective than telling. Rosencrantz offered us the rare and dislocating experience of proceeding in uncertainty, carrying on

in the absence of Truth, and this experience has the potential to shake profoundly our whole Truth-centered conceptual framework. But Travesties retreats back to the well-worn and stable ground of Truth, and in doing so, it loses its power as a critique of mastery, master narratives, Truth, and the authority of authors. In "siding with Joyce on major issues,"⁷⁴ Stoppard doubly restores essential components of the Author-Father-God model, for he writes with authorial authority of the authorial authority of Joyce. Even though the endorsement of Joyce works to restore the authority of the "message" of the Author, however, the traditional model of authorship is not simply placed back on its pedestal whole and unchanged. Significantly, the challenge to the concept of originality survives the play's change-of course, for inasmuch as Joyce's artistic genius resides in his ability to reassemble scraps of the Western tradition into new work, Stoppard is able to endorse Joyce without abandoning his critique of originality. Nevertheless, because Travesties proves unable to sustain the open-ended questioning of Truth which lay at the heart of the Rosencrantz experience, Rosencrantz remains the more profoundly political, more potentially radical play, in spite of the fact--or perhaps ultimately because of the fact--that Rosencrantz steers clear of the sort of patently political content which fills Travesties.

In spite of its regrettable turn toward Truth, however, Act One remains theatrically effective, for it is richly textured, intellectually stimulating, visually delightful, and--simply--highly entertaining, right through to its final curtain. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Act Two, which, quite apart from its Truth-centered problems, fails as theater. Stoppard rather charmingly explained to Hayman that he intended that Act Two open by boring us:

I thought, "Right. We'll have a rollicking first act, and they'll all come back from their gin-and-tonics thinking, 'Isn't it fun? What a lot of lovely jokes!' And they'll sit down, and this pretty girl will start talking about the theory of Marxism and the theory of capitalism and the theory of value. And the smiles, because they're not prepared for it, will atrophy." And that to me was like a joke in itself.⁷⁵

While the plan succeeded--audience smiles most certainly atrophy during Cecily's four page lecture--Stoppard quickly realized that no one else found his joke funny. "I over-played that hand very badly," he admits, "and at the first preview I realized that the speech had to be about Lenin only . . . I just blue-pencilled everything up to the mention of Lenin."⁷⁶ Indeed, while the published version of the text retains the entire lecture, Stoppard notes in his stage directions that "The performance of this lecture is not a requirement" (p. 66) and suggests that "it could pick up at any point, e.g. 'Lenin was convinced . . .' or 'Karl Marx had taken it as an axiom . . .'" (p. 66).

The new starting points he suggests cut at least half of the lecture and spare us a considerable amount of boredom, but Act Two's problems are by no means confined to Cecily's lecture. Whitaker provides a convenient catalogue of the act's faults as he observes that "Reviewers have often complained that the Lenin episodes in Act Two are simply expository, that their documentary realism is at odds with the notion of travesty, that they have no relation to The Importance of Being Earnest, or that they cannot plausibly be included in Carr's memory."⁷⁷ And though Whitaker attempts a generous defense of the act by presenting it as a vital term in a dialectic which "reaches out to interrogate its antithesis: the alleged importance of being in deadly earnest,"⁷⁸ his defense is simply not convincing. In the first place, he concludes his justification of the act with a tacit admission that the dialectic fails: Lenin's "merciless and self-contradictory violence stands in dark contrast to [Joyce's and Tzara's] irreverant but celebratory freedom."⁷⁹ A true dialectic would have resulted in a synthesis of the "celebratory freedom" of Act One and the deadly earnestness of Act Two; no such synthesis occurs because synthesis depends, as Whitaker observes a bit later, on "clashes of opposed but almost equally plausible [italics mine] arguments."⁸⁰ No amount of wishful thinking can transform the overt condemnation of Lenin into an argument which even approaches the plausibility of Joyce's.

In any case, even if the dialectic had worked, other problems remain. Reviewers are clearly correct to complain that the Lenin episodes "have no relation to The Importance of Being Earnest" and that "they cannot plausibly be included in Carr's memory."⁸¹ Even Stoppard concedes the second point: "Peter Wood's objection was unarguable: the whole thing is within the framework of Carr's memory except this bit. How do you get back people's belief if you interrupt it?"⁸² The answer, as Stoppard knows, is that you do not. But Stoppard resists suggestions that the Lenins should have been incorporated into Earnest. "It would have been disastrous to Prismize and Chasublize the Lenins,"⁸³ for "that would have killed the play because of the trivialization,"⁸⁴ he argues. Perhaps, but one notes that neither Joyce nor the play suffers from the "trivialization" of turning Joyce into Lady Bracknell. Stoppard's interview comments indicate that the exclusion of the Lenins from the play of Earnest was motivated less by respect and fears of trivialization than by an unequivocal desire to damn Lenin. As he explained to Hayman:

What was supposed to be happening was that we have this rather frivolous nonsense going on, and then the Lenin section comes in and says, "Life is too important. We can't afford the luxury of this artificial frivolity, this nonsense going on in the arts." Then he says, "Right. That's what I've got to say," and sits down. Then the play stands up and says, "You thought that was frivolous? You ain't seen nothin' yet." And you go into the Gallagher and Shean routine. 85 That was the architectural thing I was after.

The problem with this plan is fairly obvious: in trying to depict Lenin as unplayful and boring, Stoppard makes the whole Lenin section unplayful and boring, and boring theater is always bad theater.

As we sit through Act Two, we have to be thankful that although Stoppard refused to incorporate the Lenins into the play of Earnest, he did compromise in the revision phase by bringing the Earnest frame back onstage through the other characters. "In my original draft," he explained to Hayman, "I took the Lenin section out of the play far more radically than in the version you saw. I actually stopped the play and had actors coming down to read that entire passage from clipboards or lecterns."⁸⁶ In the revised version, Cecily still lectures from "the front of the stage" (p. 66), and she still translates the Lenins' revolution conversation, "pedantically repeating each speech in English, even the simple 'No!' and 'Yes!'" (p. 70). Nadya still addresses the audience "undramatically" (p. 79), and Lenin still delivers his key speech "from a high rostrum" (p. 85). But Stoppard punctuates the dull, undramatic lecturing and reading with welcome intrusions of first Carr, then Tzara, and finally the whole cast from Act One, who bring with them the Earnest frame and its accompanying jokes and frivolity.

Thus, Cecily's lecture on Marxism, capitalism, and the theory of value, after firmly establishing Lenin's flaw as

unwavering "fidelity to Marx" (p. 68)--"Marx had shown the only way forward. To quote Marx was enough to settle an argument. To question Marx was to betray the revolution" (p. 68)--is finally interrupted by the entrance of Carr, "very debonair in his boater and blazer" (p. 70), who hands Cecily "the visiting card he received from BENNETT in Act One" (p. 71). Carr's entrance saves us from numbing exposition about Lenin's work habits--"He would work till the lunch hour, when the library closed, and then return and work until six, except on Thursdays when we remained closed" (p. 70)--by suddenly transforming the scene into Earnest's meeting of Algernon and Cecily in the garden. "You must be Cecily!" (p. 71), Carr exclaims, to which Cecily replies, "Ssssh!" (p. 71). "You are!" (p. 71), Carr responds with delight which equals our own at finally hearing a joke.

Since Cecily is merely Lenin's misguided helper, not the arch-villain himself, she is eligible to be inducted into the Earnest frame, and after two abortive attempts to win her over, Carr at last manages to tear Cecily out of her Brechtian mode and away from her loyalty to Lenin. "Ever since Jack told me he had a younger brother who was a decadent nihilist it has been my girlish dream to reform you and to love you" (p. 79), she admits as she enters Earnest and leaves behind both Lenin and her Brechtian didacticism. The triple repetition of the scene works to

reimpose the control of Carr's faulty memory, for we recognize that Carr's train is jumping its tracks again, as it did in both the "newspapers and telegrams" sequence and the "cucumber sandwiches" sequence of Act One. The first version of the scene is primarily dedicated to restoring humor and continuity, for unlike Cecily's lecture, the dialogue between Carr and the librarian often reaches out of the scene to connect with earlier jokes. Carr, for example, tries to win Cecily's sympathy by telling her that "an overly methodical education has left me to fend as best I can with some small knowledge of the aardvark, a mastery of the abacus and a facility for abstract art" (p. 72). Stoppard gets a few extra miles out of the alphabetical order joke as Cecily and Carr trade lines about anarchism, Bolshevism, and Zimmerwaldism, naming the political movements as Cecily would have discovered them on the shelves. Cecily's explanation that Lenin is certain that Western agents are trying to prevent his return to Russia sets up an old-fashioned jab at the British as well as reminding us of Carr's remarkable incompetence as a consular official. "The British are among the most determined, though the least competent" (p. 72), she confides to Carr, who is, of course, masquerading as Tzara. "Only yesterday the Ambassador received secret instructions to watch the ports" (pp. 72-73), she continues, just moments after having informed us of the difficulties of Lenin's escape from

"this landlocked country" (p. 70). Stoppard taps the comic potential of both Carr's consistent bungling and the mistaken identity device he inherited from Wilde as he has Cecily observe, "You are not a bit like your brother. You are more English" (p. 73). "I assure you I am as Bulgarian as he is" (p. 73), Carr replies, unable to keep either the Balkan states or the details of his assumed identity straight. When Cecily, always the pedant, informs Carr that Jack/Tzara "is Rumanian" (p. 73), he responds with his usual unwarranted confidence, "They are the same place" (p. 73).

Once Cecily and Carr settle in for the second version of the scene, however, the jokes quickly vanish again, even though the scene is ostensibly inside the playful Earnest mode. Not only does Stoppard abruptly abandon the comic mood called for by the Earnest frame, but he suddenly and inexplicably transforms Carr from a bumbling fool lacking even a rudimentary familiarity with the map of Europe into a consistent and intelligent political analyst. As Carr coherently and effectively shoots down Cecily's Marxist arguments with witty, then eloquent versions of Stoppard's own interview rebuttals to Marxism,⁸⁷ we see the evidence of Stoppard's having sacrificed the plausibility of his character and the effectiveness of his architectural scheme to the exigencies of presenting Truth. First, Carr successfully challenges Cecily's condemnation of socialist

politician Ramsay MacDonald--she labels him "an economist and opportunist" (p. 76)--by asking, "But do you mean that forcing up wages and voting their own chaps into power is against the interests of the workers?" (p. 76). Then, he rebuts her assertion that "Imperialism had introduced a breathing space, but the inexorable working-out of Marx's theory of capital--" (p. 76) with, "No, no, no, no, my dear girl--Marx got it wrong" (p. 76). Finally, in a speech whose Truth-value is matched only by Joyce's defense of the artist, he delivers a cogent and unquestionably valid historical analysis to support his contention that Marx misread the evidence. Instead of behaving "according to their class" (p. 77), Carr argues, the workers "showed superior strength, superior intelligence, superior morality . . . Legislation, unions, share capital, consumer power--in all kinds of ways and for all kinds of reasons, the classes moved closer together instead of further apart" (p. 77).

Stoppard seems to have sorted out what his "answer would in the end be"⁸⁸ if he were "given enough time to think"⁸⁹ every time he is asked why his plays are not "political," but the Stoppard who does not know is a far better playwright than the Stoppard who does know. Carr's speech is too clearly a statement of Truth to need any buttressing from external sources, but Stoppard's interview statement accompanying his attack on Marx--"he got it

wrong"⁹⁰--and on Lenin--"in the ten years after 1917 fifty times more people were done to death than in the fifty years before 1917"⁹¹--is so uncharacteristic that it bears quoting. "My plays are a lot to do with the fact that I just don't know,"⁹² he began in the 1974 "Ambushes" interview. "Few statements remain unrebutted," he continued. "But I'm not going to rebut the things I have been saying just now. One thing I feel sure about is that a materialistic view of history is an insult to the human race."⁹³ In his unqualified certainty, Stoppard is willing to break his controlling frame and send his senile, bumbling narrator on-stage to deliver an out-of-character, eloquent, coherent version of the playwright's own rebuttal to Marxism. Perhaps the greatest unintended irony of the speech is the moral Carr draws. "The critical moment never came" (p. 77), he tells Cecily. "The tide must have turned at about the time when Das Kapital after eighteen years of hard labour was finally coming off the press, a moving reminder, Cecily, of the folly of authorship [italics mine]" (p. 77). If Marx's folly was presuming to know as he wrote, Stoppard's critique is more than hollow.

Like Tzara's rebuttal to Joyce's key speech, Cecily's refutation of Carr's critique of Marxism ultimately supports what it aims to undermine. "Marx warned us against the liberals, the philanthropists, the piecemeal reformers--change won't come from them but from a head-on collision,

that's how history works!" (p. 77), she heatedly argues, insisting as before that "Marx had shown the only way forward" (p. 68). But her story, intended to illustrate Lenin's "superior morality" (p. 77), damns the revolutionary more surely than any other single attack in the play:

When Lenin was 21 there was famine in Russia. The intellectuals organised relief--soup kitchens, corn seed, all kinds of do-gooding with Tolstoy in the lead. Lenin did--nothing. He understood that the famine was a force for the revolution[. . .] (p. 77)

What other tale could more effectively horrify and alienate Western audiences, who so typically pride themselves for their long tradition of liberal reform and "all kinds of do-gooding"?

But now Stoppard's anxious question looms even larger: "How do you get back people's belief if you interrupt it?"⁹⁴ And even more emphatically than before, the answer is simply that you do not. The Earnest frame, whose seamless pasting had previously been such a source of delight, now often seem forced and contrived without the underpinning a plausible Carr provided, and one senses the Earnest plot fairly rushing to its conclusion. Carr wins Cecily's love just by professing to agree with the contents of the folder she gave him in the second version of the garden scene--the folder which she believes contains Lenin's manuscript, but which, of course, actually contains Joyce's. Cecily crosses over to the Earnest plot and style, and she and Carr embrace,

all in the space of one page of dialogue. Then, "NADYA enters and comes down to address the audience, undramatically" (p. 79), and the play abruptly returns to its unfriendly parody of Brecht's theater as Nadya stands onstage and delivers a boring expository monologue chronicling Lenin's preparation to return to Russia. Tzara's entrance shifts the play back to Earnest for a moment, as Tzara/Jack denies that Carr/Algernon is his brother, but while the comic plot is more entertaining than Nadya's undramatic exposition, it is simply spliced in and has no connection with the Lenin story unfolding onstage.

The gap between the two plots grows wider when, after more exposition accompanied by a Brechtian "projection screen" (p. 81), Stoppard specifies that the stage be divided into two separate playing areas: "The corner of the Stage now occupied by TZARA and CARR is independent of the LENINS" (p. 82). Tzara and Carr sit in one corner discussing the merits of preventing Lenin's escape from Zurich while Nadya provides the narration to accompany Lenin's statements from their position at center-stage. And once again, Stoppard allows Carr to step out of character and tell us what he could not have possibly known in 1917: "You're an artist" (p. 83), he observes to Tzara. "And multi-coloured micturition is no trick to these boys, they'll have you pissing blood" (p. 83). Just moments after that ominous warning, we hear the "distant sound of [a] train setting off" (p. 84),

and though Carr is now a mere vestige of a character, the context supplied by the play obligates us to sympathize with Carr's belated decision to prevent Lenin's return to Russia: "No, it is perfectly clear in my mind" (p. 84), he decides too late. "He must be stopped. The Russians have got a government of patriotic and moderate men[. . . .] All in all a promising foundation for a liberal democracy on the Western model" (p. 84).

Though Lenin and Nadya have left Zurich and taken with them any remote possibility that Carr's memory could now include them, they reappear on stage to assure us that the horrors Carr predicted all come true. As though he feared giving the audience any room to provide its own context for interpreting the historical reality of the Russian Revolution, Stoppard makes every conceivable effort to present Lenin as a tyrannical monster. He first explains that "There is a much reproduced photograph of Lenin addressing the crowd in a public square in May 1920--" (p. 84). Lenin looks a bit like a maniac in the image, "his chin jutting, his hands gripping the edge of the rostrum" (p. 84). In case readers of the play are unacquainted with the Soviet practice of airbrushing out revolutionary leaders who later fell into disfavor, Stoppard notes parenthetically that "This is the photo, incidentally, which Stalin had retouched so as to expunge Kamenev and Trotsky who feature prominently in the original" (p. 84). Stoppard may be unable to

represent the airbrushing in the theater, but he is adamant that the maniacal tyranny captured in the photograph be transferred to the stage. First he directs that "The image on stage now recalls this photograph" (p. 85), and then in remarkably emphatic and insistent language, he specifies that "It is structurally important to the Act that the following speech is delivered from the strongest possible position with the most dramatic change of effect from the general stage appearance preceding it" (p. 85).

Lenin can no longer be said to be a character in the play; he becomes "the orator" (p. 85), "the only person on stage" (p. 85), and the audience becomes the crowd in the public square. Stoppard explained to Hayman that as Lenin delivers his harangue against freedom of the press--a sacred cow for Westerners of virtually all political persuasions--he "keeps convicting himself out of his own mouth. It's absurd. It's full of incredible syllogisms."⁹⁵ Indeed it is, as Lenin argues first that the press will be free, then that the party will control it and will, of course, allow no advocacy of "anti-party views" (p. 85). Lest the audience doubt the authenticity of the speech, Stoppard had Nadya appear at its close to inform us that "Ilyich wrote these remarks in 1905 [.] . ." (p. 86). More Brechtian exposition follows which confirms first Tzara's Act One charge that political revolutionaries like Lenin have hopelessly bourgeois artistic tastes and then Carr's prophetic

warning that these boys will "have [artists] pissing blood" (p. 83). Finally, the Beethoven sonata Tzara described in Act One "is quietly introduced" (p. 89) to motivate Lenin's last speech. "Amazing, superhuman music" (p. 89), he observes. "It always makes me feel proud of the miracles that human beings can perform" (p. 89). But there is no room for human miracles in Lenin's totalitarian state, no room for artistic expression: "I can't listen to music often. It affects my nerves, makes me want to say nice things and pat the heads of those people who while living in this vile hell can create such beauty" (p. 89). And as the sonata continues, reinforcing our faith in the unqualified goodness of free artistic expression, Lenin, now a paranoid sadist, exits to the vile hell he has created, amidst these last self-damning words: "Nowadays we can't pat heads or we'll get our hands bitten off. We've got to hit heads, hit them without mercy, though ideally we're against doing violence to people . . ." (p. 89).

With Lenin at last safely removed, the play is free to pick up the "celebratory freedom" it revelled in before the Lenins spoiled the fun. "The 'Appassionata' swells in the dark to cover the setting change to 'The Room'" (p. 89) and to give the audience time to be emotionally moved and grateful that Lenin's iron fist cannot quash artistic freedom in the West. The sonata then "degenerates absurdly into 'Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean'" (p. 89), and the play shifts

abruptly to a rhymed musical version of Earnest's tea scene, in which Cecily and Gwendolen discover that they are apparently engaged to the same man. Carr and Tzara enter with their accidentally swapped folders, and their twin admissions that they found the contents "Rubbish!" (p. 94) and "Bilge!" (p. 94) quickly set the scene for the discovery of the mistake and the comic happy ending.

But the rush toward the conclusion slows down as "BENNETT enters with champagne for two" (p. 95) and Stoppard returns for a brief period at the end of the play to the kind of writing he does best. The jokes, in part because they have no butt, are once again funny, and the language is as dense and allusive as it was in Act One. Roughly patterned after the muffin-eating episode immediately preceding the comic resolution of Earnest, the scene opens as Tzara repeats Cecily's observation that Bennett "has radical sympathies" (p. 95). Carr's reply draws both substance and style from Wilde, whose Algernon had once elegantly complained about servants consuming household champagne. "There is no one so radical as a manservant whose freedom of the champagne bin has been interfered with" (p. 95), Carr notes. But Tzara is not to worry because, Carr continues, "I've put a stop to it" (p. 95). "Given him notice?" (p. 95), Tzara asks. No, Carr replies, "Given him more champagne" (p. 95). Tzara's response indicates that he, like Bennett, has been fully coopted back into society:

"We Rumanians have much to learn from the English" (p. 95), he comments approvingly. Then, seamlessly, Stoppard returns to Carr's hopeless geography as the consular official observes sympathetically to his Rumanian friend, "I expect you'll be missing Sofia" (p. 95). Confused, Tzara corrects him: "You mean Gwendolen" (p. 95). Carr "frowns; clears" (p. 95) and sets things straight with "Bucharest" (p. 95), finally naming the capital of Rumania. Carr's bumbling continues as he replies to Tzara's "Oh, yes. Yes. Paris of the Balkans . . ." (p. 95) with "Silly place to put it, really . . ." (p. 95). And then, when Carr sips his champagne, the jokes slide easily back to the cooptation of Bennett as Carr sputters, "Is this the Perrier-Jouet, Brut '89????!!!" (p. 95), naming, of course, the brand Algernon consumed under the guise of Earnest in Wilde's play. The Perrier Jouet is, as Carr quickly realizes, "All gone . . ." (p. 95), the price paid to forestall the revolution and keep social relations just as they are. Bennett's services are clearly worth a few bottles of champagne, for he proves his value again as he drops back into the familiar refrain of Act One, "I have put the newspapers and telegrams on the sideboard, sir" (p. 95) and proceeds to elegantly summarize the news for his eminently uninformed master. Recycling the "A, not-A" rhetorical strategy of his first news report, Bennett recounts that "The Neue Zuricher Zeitung and the Zuricher Post announce respectively the cultural high and

low point of the theatrical season[. . . .] The Zeitung singles you out for a personal triumph in a demanding role" (p. 95). The rhetorical similarity between this cultural report and Bennett's Act One war report also subtly recalls Joyce's claim that in neutral Zurich "culture is the continuation of the war by other means" (p. 51).

The connection, though, is probably too subtle for Carr, but something in his free-associating mind triggers a link, and he mutters "Irish lout" (p. 95) as Bennett exits, only to return immediately to announce the arrival of "Mr. Joyce" (p. 96). The play now hurries to its prearranged conclusion as Joyce scans the contents of Tzara's folder and discovers that it does not contain his manuscript describing "events taking place in a lying-in hospital" (p. 97). Just as Lady Bracknell once boomed, "Prism! Where is that baby?"⁹⁶ Joyce now booms, "Miss Carr, where is that missing chapter???" (p. 97). The folders are swapped, followed by "a rapid and formal climax" (p. 97) and the dance of comedy, which pairs Tzara and Gwendolen, Carr and Cecily, but leaves Joyce and Bennett to dance independently, awkward substitutes for Prism and Chasuble.

The dancers exit, but Old Carr and Old Cecily hobble back on for a few closing words. Still a pedant after all these years, Old Cecily tries to convince Old Carr that he "never even saw Lenin" (p. 98) and was "never the Consul" (p. 98) and that his dates are all wrong--in short, that

the play we just watched has no historical validity. In an obvious attempt to "get back people's belief"⁹⁷ in "the framework of Carr's memory,"⁹⁸ Stoppard gives Carr the last words which deliberately recall the narrator's senile rambling at the beginning of the play. "Great days . . . Zurich during the war. Refugees, spies, exiles, painters, poets, writers, radicals of all kinds. I knew them all" (p. 98), he insists in defiance of Cecily's attempts to correct his delusions. "I learned three things in Zurich during the war. I wrote them down" (p. 98), he continues, still trying to commit his memoirs to paper. "Firstly, you're either a revolutionary or you're not, and if you're not you might as well be an artist as anything else. Secondly, if you can't be an artist, you might as well be a revolutionary . . . I forgot the third thing" (pp. 98-99), Carr concludes as the lights fade on Travesties.

With that, Carr leaves the play as he started it, a confused old fool whose final senile rambling betrays no hint of the mental astuteness he revealed when he first courted Cecily in the library with coherent rebuttals to her beloved Marxist ideology. We, too, leave this play confused, wondering whether to believe in the Carr of the opening and close of the play or in the Carr who so insightfully revealed the errors of the Marxist way. If Carr's credibility as a character has suffered from these implausible flip-flops, Stoppard's credibility as a playwright has also

suffered, perhaps most obviously from Carr's unconvincing swings, but from other radical shifts as well. We are given a controlling frame which we invest with our belief, much as we invest our belief in the Player's death by Guildenstern's hand in Rosencrantz. In both cases, the illusion is broken, but the breaking of the illusions works toward opposite ends in the two plays. When the Player gets up after his convincing "death," we realize again that neither playwrights nor the theater can bring us the Truth of death. But when Carr stands up and effectively refutes Marxism after his character has been defined by confusion and ignorance, the aim is to turn the theater back into a forum for bringing us Truth.

Of course, the most significant difference between the two instances is simply that the Player's resurrection works--and works brilliantly--within the context of the play while Carr's sudden coherence and insight remain irreconcilable and threaten to destroy the whole frame which makes Act One possible. Carr's blatant inconsistency, the play's most obvious flaw, is rooted in the dual nature of Travesties itself. It began as a playful romp in Rosencrantz-style uncertainty, for which Carr's senility and confusion are ideally suited. But once the play turns from questioning Truth to presenting Truth, Carr's memory no longer fits, for its inaccuracy works at cross-purposes with the thrust of Act Two, which seeks to present with certainty the

historical Truth about Russia in the 1920s in order to dispel any sympathy we might have felt toward Lenin and his revolution.

The failed attempt at the end to reinstate Carr's memory as the controlling frame should remove any lingering suspicions that the dual nature of the play is somehow part of a grand but subtle scheme whose point we are missing. If anything, Stoppard's efforts to plaster over the crack which has developed only call more attention to the gaping hole in his architectural construct. Rather than trying to wish it away, we can proceed more productively by accepting that the flaw is there and then asking how and why it came to be. Stoppard joins many of his critics in designating Cecily's lecture as the beginning of the problem: "It was a miscalculation,"⁹⁹ he admits, and then goes on to explain the weakness as essentially a stylistic error. "What I was trying to do was write a play which was an anthology of different sorts of play and that was one sort. I mean different kinds of style, different kinds of idiom."¹⁰⁰

This explanation is misleading on both counts, however. In the first place, Travesties' problems begin with Joyce's unrefuted speech in Act One, well before Cecily's lecture, for once the play makes its decisive turn toward Truth, the stylistic games lose their reason for being and Carr becomes excess baggage. And we must steadfastly resist any suggestion that the Brechtian style of the lecture and

the Lenin episodes is itself at fault. We know from experience that the epic theater is by no means intrinsically boring, and we need only look back to Bennett's Brechtian reports on the Russian Revolution to realize that Stoppard was perfectly capable of incorporating Brecht's idiom into a playful and entertaining scene. It is not that Stoppard confronted a style he could not play with; rather, he confronted subjects he could not play with.

Prodded by repeated interview questions-cum-accusations about the apolitical nature of his plays, Stoppard finally wrote a play that might qualify as "political" in the limited sense that interviewers and even academic critics so often use the term. But, ironically, the overtly political content of Travesties contributes directly to the play's reinstatement of essential elements of the conservative, Truth-centered model of authorship. Faced with the competing visions of Joyce, whom he obviously admires, and Lenin, whom he even more obviously detests, Stoppard ultimately proved unable to write from a position of not knowing, proved incapable of creating the effect of playing in uncertainty. Once he abandoned the distanced perspective that had served him so well in Rosencrantz, to write instead from an immediate, unfiltered perspective, Stoppard could no longer sustain the play of questions which lay at the heart of Rosencrantz's challenge to the Truth of authorship. When Travesties shifts from exploring the limits of competing

visions of Truth to endorsing the Truth of the Joycean vision, it becomes, in effect, yet another master narrative. And when Travesties becomes a master narrative, not only does it lose its power as a critique of mastery and Truth, but it also begins to crack at the seams. Thus, in both aesthetic and political terms, Travesties falls short of Stoppard's earlier achievement in Rosencrantz, which, in spite of the misguided attacks it has suffered at the hands of critics, remains the more profoundly political and aesthetically satisfying play.

Notes

¹Tom Stoppard, "First Interview with Tom Stoppard," in Ronald Hayman, Tom Stoppard, Contemporary Playwrights Series, 3rd ed. (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p. 2.

²Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 21.

³Tom Stoppard, Travesties (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 62. All further quotations refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text. Unless otherwise indicated by brackets, all ellipses are Stoppard's.

⁴Tom Stoppard, "Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas," Theatre Quarterly 4 (May-July 1974): 12-15. When Cecily explains to Carr that "Imperialism has introduced a breathing space, but the inexorable working-out of Marx's theory of capital . . ." (p. 76), Carr replies, "No, no, no, no, my dear girl--Marx got it wrong. He got it wrong for good reasons but he got it wrong just the same. And twice over. In the first place he was the victim of an historical accident" (p. 76). Compare Carr's argument to Stoppard's interview statement: Marx's "theory of capital, his theory of value, and his theory of revolution, have all been refuted by modern economics and by history. In short he got it wrong" (p. 13). Similarly,

when Cecily announces that "the gap between rich and poor gets wider--" (p. 76), Carr argues, "But it doesn't" (p. 76). In the same interview, Stoppard complains that playwright David Hare includes in the published text of The Exhibition "an epigraph in the form of a statistical table showing that down the ages the top ten per cent of the population owned eighty per cent of the property: (pp. 14-15). It bothered Stoppard that Hare "only took the table down to 1960, and it so happens . . . that it goes on to show that by 1970 a huge change had taken place--a much less unequal distribution" (p. 15). This interview, published as Travesties opened in London, leaves little room for speculation about where Stoppard stands on Marxism-Leninism.

⁵Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," in Brecht on Theatre, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 71.

⁶Brecht, p. 71.

⁷Brecht, p. 71.

⁸Brecht, p. 71.

⁹Brecht, p. 71.

¹⁰Craig Werner, "Stoppard's Critical Travesty, or, Who Vindicates Whom and Why," Arizona Quarterly 35 (1979): 228.

¹¹Werner, p. 228.

¹²Werner, p. 230.

¹³Werner, p. 230.

¹⁴Werner, p. 235.

¹⁵Werner, p. 235.

¹⁶Thomas Whitaker, Tom Stoppard (New York: Grove Press, 1983), p. 120.

¹⁷Whitaker, p. 120.

¹⁸Whitaker, p. 120.

¹⁹Whitaker, p. 121.

²⁰Whitaker, p. 108.

²¹John Simon, "Theater Chronicler," Hudson Review 29 (Spring 1976): 79.

²²Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 146.

²³Michael Hinden, "Jumpers: Stoppard and the Theater of Exhaustion," Twentieth Century Literature 27 (Spring 1981): 4.

²⁴Hinden, p. 4.

²⁵Hinden, p. 4.

²⁶Hinden, p. 4.

²⁷Ian Donaldson, "'The Ledger of the Lost-and-Stolen Office': Parody and Dramatic Comedy," Southern Review (Adelaide) 13 i (1980): 47.

²⁸John William Cooke, "The Optical Allusion: Perception and Form in Stoppard's Travesties," Modern Drama 24 (December 1981): 526.

²⁹Margaret Gold, "Who Are the Dadas of Travesties?" Modern Drama 21 (March 1978): 59.

³⁰Gold, p. 64.

³¹Gold, p. 64.

³²Cooke, p. 528.

³³Cooke, p. 528.

³⁴Jim Hunter, Tom Stoppard's Plays (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 240, provides a full "translation" of Tzara's opening poem:

Eel ate enormous appletzara
Il est un homme, s'appelle Tzara
He is a man called Tzara

key dairy chefs hat he'llearn oomparah
Qui des richesses a-t-il nonpareil
Who has unparalleled talent

Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east
Il reste a la Suisse parce qu'il est un artist
He stays in Switzerland because he is an artist

noon avuncluar ill day Clara!
'Nous n'avons que l'art,' il déclara.
'We have only art,' he declared.

³⁵Barthes, p. 148.

³⁶Barthes, p. 148.

³⁷William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (Atlanta: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 441.

³⁸Gold, pp. 60-61.

³⁹Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, in The Norton Introduction to Literature, shorter 3rd ed., eds. Carl E. Bain, Jerome Beaty, and J. Paul Hunter (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1982), p. 708.

⁴⁰Cited in Whitaker, p. 113.

⁴¹Gold, p. 61.

⁴²Hunter, p. 239.

⁴³Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁴⁴Cooke, p. 535.

⁴⁵Cooke, p. 535.

⁴⁶Cooke, p. 535.

⁴⁷Cooke, p. 535.

⁴⁸Cooke, p. 535.

⁴⁹Gold, p. 61.

⁵⁰Whitaker, p. 123.

⁵¹Whitaker, p. 123.

⁵²Wilde, p. 671.

⁵³See Hamlet, 2.2.394-395, "the play, I remember,
pleased not the million; 'twas caviary to the general."

⁵⁴Whitaker, p. 120, argues that Tzara's "moral and
political outrage wins our sympathy."

⁵⁵Whitaker, p. 120.

⁵⁶Werner, p. 235.

⁵⁷Werner, p. 228.

⁵⁸Hinden, p. 4.

⁵⁹Cooke, p. 528.

⁶⁰Wilde, p. 675.

⁶¹See Tom Stoppard, Artist Descending a Staircase, in Albert's Bridge and Other Plays (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 105.

⁶²Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 2.

⁶³Whitaker, p. 116.

⁶⁴Whitaker, p. 116.

⁶⁵Wilde, p. 708.

⁶⁶Wilde, p. 708.

⁶⁷Whitaker, p. 121.

⁶⁸In "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodern Fiction," the Atlantic, January 1980, p. 69, John Barth observes, "But with Finnegans Wake or Ezra Pound's Canots, we need a guide because of the inherent and immediate difficulty of the text. We are told that Bertolt Brecht, out of socialist conviction, kept on his writing desk a toy donkey bearing the sign Even I must understand it; the high modernists might aptly put on their desks a professor of literature doll bearing, unless its speciality happened to be the literature of high modernism, the sign Not even I can understand it."

⁶⁹Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 14.

⁷⁰Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 13.

⁷¹Whitaker, p. 121.

⁷²Werner, p. 231.

⁷³Werner, p. 231.

⁷⁴Hinden, p. 4.

⁷⁵Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 9.

⁷⁶Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 9.

⁷⁷Whitaker, p. 122.

⁷⁸Whitaker, p. 124.

⁷⁹Whitaker, p. 126.

⁸⁰Whitaker, p. 127.

⁸¹Whitaker, p. 122.

⁸²Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁸³Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁸⁴Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁸⁵Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁸⁶Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁸⁷See Stoppard, "Ambushes," pp. 12-13, and note 4 above.

⁸⁸Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 2.

⁸⁹Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 2.

⁹⁰Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 13.

⁹¹Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 12.

⁹²Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 13.

⁹³Stoppard, "Ambushes," p. 13.

⁹⁴Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁹⁵Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁹⁶Wilde, p. 715.

⁹⁷Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁹⁸Stoppard, "First Interview," in Hayman, p. 10.

⁹⁹Stoppard, "Second Interview with Tom Stoppard," in Hayman, p. 143.

¹⁰⁰Stoppard, "Second Interview," in Hayman, p. 143.

CONCLUSION OR THE IMPORTANCE OF
BEING PLAYFUL

"I suppose that's the fate of all us artists[. . .] People saying they preferred the early stuff."

--Tom Stoppard, The Real Thing¹

Because Stoppard is still writing plays and the direction of his future work remains uncertain, it is far too early to tell whether these words, spoken by Henry, the playwright in Stoppard's most recent play, The Real Thing, will ultimately prove true. The critical assessment of Stoppard's work remains in the formative stage and continues to be characterized by a deep split which divides his critics into two opposed camps. If this split persists after nearly two decades of criticism, perhaps it is because Stoppard's canon is itself split: on one hand, we find the early, derivative, playful plays which steer clear of overt political content, and on the other, we have the later, "realistic," socially committed plays. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead remains, of course, the most outstanding example of "the early stuff," but a number of shorter works such as The Real Inspector Hound and Artist Descending a Staircase also retain the playfulness and uncertainty which graced Rosencrantz. The Real Inspector

Hound in particular is reminiscent of Rosencrantz, for not only is it free of any hint of overt political content, but it is also openly derivative inasmuch as it is a broad parody of Agatha Christie murder mysteries. And as in Rosencrantz, the theatrical illusion is decisively disrupted as two drama critics, members of the on stage audience, first critique the play and then get caught up in its action. These early plays, scorned by members of one camp as socially irrelevant, frivolous, and parasitical, are warmly embraced by members of the other camp, who see no reason to apologize for the plays' characteristic uncertainty and playfulness, or for the derivativeness that makes so much of the playfulness possible. While critics who favor the early plays never labelled them "parasitic," they have only recently begun to treat Stoppard's borrowing as an essential element of a larger strategy. Michael Hinden's reading of Rosencrantz (and other early plays) as a tribute to "theatrical exhaustion" stands out as one of the most coherent and intelligent attempts to incorporate Stoppard's derivativeness into a more comprehensive reading of the play.² John Perlette also offers an invaluable analysis of Rosencrantz as "Theatre at the Limit,"³ for his insistence on the intimate connection between the play's form and its content pushes for just the sort of integrated reading the play demands. But neither these two excellent analyses nor the relatively few articles which proceed in

a similar direction have completed the work of revising the critical assessment of Rosencrantz, for more than any other Stoppard play, it has been the target of misguided charges of "parasitism" and political irrelevance.

Unfortunately, just when Hinden, Perlette, and other critics began to push for a revision of the "parasite" consensus on the early plays, Stoppard ceased his overt borrowing and started to write "original," socially committed plays in the "realistic" mode. When the derivativeness vanished, much of the playfulness and uncertainty disappeared as well, leaving straightforward dialogue which often overtly addresses current social and political issues. Every Good Boy Deserves Favor, for example, in spite of its innovative incorporation of a full orchestra into the play's main action, remains an essentially "realistic" play which openly condemns the repression of free speech. It is set in a Soviet mental hospital for political dissidents, and its content leaves little room for speculating about where Stoppard stands on Soviet repression. Night and Day, set in an African country caught in the throes of revolution, is likewise a "realistic" play which directly examines a pressing issue: the proper role of the press in covering such upheavals. Similarly, his television play Professional Foul takes two British professors of philosophy to Czechoslovakia (Stoppard's birthplace) where they are forced to turn from the abstract theorizing of an academic conference

to face a "real life" moral quandary--should they risk smuggling out the politically controversial doctoral dissertation of one of the professor's former students, a Czech citizen suffering persecution at the hands of the secret police? For those critics who were uncomfortable with the apparent irrelevance, lack of "seriousness," and "unoriginality" of Rosencrantz and other early plays, these later works represent a welcome change to social commitment. Carol Billman, for example, indicates her support of Stoppard's turn toward relevance and commitment by observing that Every Good Boy Deserves Favor, Night and Day, and Professional Foul "truly represent social engagements on Stoppard's part: these plays face squarely such issues as governmental restriction of individual freedom."⁴

While it might seem that Stoppard has made a firm decision to abandon playfulness and derivativeness to write "realistic" plays advocating social change, his most recent play casts some doubt on such a conclusion, for The Real Thing attempts a Rosencrantz-style exploration of the limits of theatrical representation. Instead of death, love is substituted as the thing which cannot be represented, whether the mode of representation be Strindberg's naturalistic theater or Ford's theater of "love in wigs and rhymed couplets,"⁵ as the Player once described that style. Unfortunately, the "realistic" frame Stoppard provides robs the stylistic play of its potentially dislocating impact, for after the opening scene, the characters are firmly grounded

in a stable context which allows the audience to account for the intruding scripts in "realistic" terms. Furthermore, like the transitional Travesties, which is caught halfway between the early and late plays, The Real Thing also directly addresses the relationship between art and politics and comes down conclusively and emphatically on the side of the pure artist whose only concern is excellence in craft. So, on one hand, the play attempts a Rosencrantz-style exploration of the theater's inability to bring us the Truth, and on the other hand, it brings us the undisguised Truth about the incompatibility of art and politics, reiterating the message of the second half of Travesties. Of course, there is a certain irony in Stoppard's using the traditional Truth-centered, message-oriented mode which typifies his later plays to deride Truth-centered, message oriented plays--just the sort of play that Brodie (The Real Thing's equivalent to Travesties' arch-villain, Lenin) attempts to write from his jail cell.

Perhaps because The Real Thing tries to embody both the early playful style and the later certain style, the critical reaction to the play has been decidedly mixed, even polarized. Depending on the critic, "the style is reassuringly Stoppardian,"⁶ full of "witty puns, elegant jokes, [and] comic misunderstanding,"⁷ or alternatively, "clear-cut,"⁸ even "rather dull"⁹ because of its relentless pursuit of its themes. It is, however, somewhat misleading to speak of the critical reaction to the play, for if Stoppard

criticism as a whole is still in the formative stage, criticism of The Real Thing remains in the embryonic phase. Only two substantive articles have yet appeared, but the widely diverging assessments they offer indicate that Stoppard's latest play will leave his critics as deeply divided as ever.

Centering his reading around the love relationships which form one of the play's two main plots, Hersh Zeifman sees The Real Thing as "Comedy of Ambush," very much in the tradition of the early plays. In addition to the "reassuringly Stoppardian"¹⁰ style, he cites the "cunningly patterned and allusive"¹¹ first scene as "another Stoppardian signature."¹² Zeifman briefly acknowledges that the play is autobiographical: "Henry is a playwright--a playwright with a reputation for being witty, clever, 'intellectual,' much like Stoppard."¹³ But he does not give any indication that he finds this remarkable, as it certainly is for a playwright like Stoppard who had previously avoided autobiographical revelations in favor of the distancing that masks and layers of borrowed art provide. Furthermore, Zeifman apparently overlooks the possibility that Henry's autobiographical origins might work to lend his views a special authority, for he reads the play as part of Stoppard's early, playful tradition rather than as an example of the later, message-oriented style. He asks, "But is [Henry and Annie's] love 'the real thing'? What is 'the real thing' when it comes to love?"¹⁴ Then, clearly

placing this latest play in the context of the uncertain, early style, he asserts, "The rest of the play attempts to answer these questions--or rather, as is typical of Stoppard's plays, it bounces the questions around in a kind of endless debate, with no single 'answer' shown to be indisputably right."¹⁵

Not only does Zeifman see the content as open-ended, but he also finds the form to be reminiscent of the dislocating experience of early plays like Rosencrantz: "The very structure of his newest play--not simply its thematic content--dramatizes the difficulty inherent in determining precisely what 'the real thing' is."¹⁶ "Once again," he continues, "the form of a Stoppard play mirrors its theme."¹⁷ He describes "the Pirandellian opening"¹⁸ of the play, which depicts Max discovering Charlotte's adultery, apparently 'the real thing,' but in fact a scene from Henry's latest play, and observes, "Stoppard is deliberately shaking his audience up."¹⁹ He continues by describing the series of such "ambushes" which recur as the love relationships develop and notes, "Stoppard uses this kind of structural dislocation repeatedly in The Real Thing."²⁰ Then, in language which could easily be transferred to an analysis of Rosencrantz with only a minor substitution of "death" for "love," he asks, "Dramatists write constantly about love, but can its 'real' essence ever accurately be captured on-stage?"²¹ Thus, Zeifman undoubtedly sees The Real Thing in the flattering light created by the early,

dislocating, playful works, and therefore declares Stoppard's most recent play a success.

Richard Corballis, however, offers an almost diametrically opposed reading. Unlike Zeifman, he emphasizes both the play's autobiographical origins and its second main plot centered on the relationship between art and politics. He notes the "remarkable similarities"²² between Henry and Stoppard which "continue to emerge"²³ throughout the play, some trivial, like their shared love of cricket, but others of unquestionable significance. Henry and Stoppard have the same "attitudes to their work, for example,"²⁴ and when "Henry argues vehemently that craftsmanship matters more than content in the making of plays," he "echoes Stoppard himself."²⁵ After cataloguing other biographical links between Stoppard and his character--"both undergo divorce before finding security in a second marriage (and the play is dedicated to Miriam, Stoppard's second wife); neither has much taste in music"²⁶--Corballis explores one of the most intriguing correlations between Stoppard and his character. "Henry is goaded into a semblance of political commitment when Annie persuades him to rewrite Brodie's play for television,"²⁷ he observes. And while Corballis acknowledges "the political activism which has characterized Stoppard's life and work since 1977,"²⁸ he questions the parallel on the grounds that Stoppard's turn toward activism "has been more whole-hearted than Henry's,"²⁹ as well as "more durable."³⁰ He draws a further distinction between

the real playwright and the character-playwright by noting that "the objects of Stoppard's political attentions--Havel, Kohout, Bukovsky and the rest--have always been more worthy and substantial figures than Brodie, the straw man with whom Henry is persuaded to involve himself."³¹ Corballis concludes his extended discussion of the play's autobiographical roots by arguing that "this discrepancy between Henry and Stoppard is enough to prove that The Real Thing is not simply an autobiographical ramble,"³² but he concedes that "a certain autobiographical input is undeniable and it casts an interesting and unwonted shadow over the play's conclusion."³³

Just as Corballis differs from Zeifman by giving more attention to the "political art" strand of the play and to its autobiographical roots, so he differs in reading The Real Thing as closer to the Truth-centered, message-oriented style of Stoppard's later work than to the playful uncertainty of the early plays. He argues that "It analyzes two important problems and comes to clear-cut decisions about both of them."³⁴ The first of the two problems he designates, Annie's involvement in the "Justice for Brodie Committee," is, as he argues, unambiguously resolved, for the final scene discredits Brodie, and Annie's commitment to this unredeemable thug, more thoroughly than even Travesties' second half discredits Lenin. Corballis sees a second problem in "Henry's theories about love,"³⁵ his "emotional sterility,"³⁶ and he argues that Henry

ultimately abandons his rigid, "clockwork" conception of love to adopt a more flexible approach which is less static and idealistic, much as Annie abandons her idealized notion of "Justice for Brodie." In both cases, "the play as a whole comes down on the side of 'mystery' and repudiates 'clock-work,'"³⁷ as it drifts "away from closed systems towards the flux of reality."³⁸ In Corballis's view, then, Stoppard "has an important decision to make about his future work: whether to pursue wit at the expense of morality . . . or to pursue the morality and minimize the wit."³⁹ While he expresses the hope that Stoppard "can rediscover the old formula for leavening the moral 'mystery' with some engaging 'clockwork,'"⁴⁰ he fears that Stoppard has sacrificed word play and wit in The Real Thing to pursue moral themes relentlessly: "Although some of the craftsmanship is as pleasing as ever, all this is as tinsel on the surface of a play that plods its way, especially in Act Two, through a succession of scenes which are both unduly static and unduly similar in construction."⁴¹ Thus, he suspects that Stoppard has taken to heart "the old accusation that his plays 'don't really make clear statements,'"⁴² and in the search for clarity of theme, "has produced a rather dull play."⁴³

The two assessments differ so radically that one wonders at first if Zeifman and Corballis are writing about the same work. For Zeifman, The Real Thing is a playful

exploration of the theater's inability to represent love, a series of comic "ambushes." For Corballis, it is a static, autobiographical and dull play which minimizes comic games to pursue morality. If Zeifman and Corballis read the play as an example of two different types of theater, perhaps it is because the play is itself divided. The love plot does indeed seem close to Rosencrantz, for Stoppard revives the strategy of employing different modes of representation, different styles of theater, in an attempt to expose the limits of what the stage can adequately represent. On the other hand, the plot centered on the relationship between art and politics bears a remarkable resemblance to Travesties' second half, both in structure and in substance, and instead of questioning the theater's ability to bring us Truth and "reality," it delivers with certainty the message that politics and art do not mix. But unlike Travesties, which shifts from the playful mode to the message-oriented mode at the halfway mark, The Real Thing blends the two modes from the very beginning, for the love between Henry and Annie depends upon a successful resolution of her misguided attachment to Brodie.

The play opens, as Zeifman observes, with a Pirandelian scene between Charlotte and Max which thoroughly dislocates the audience. We expect exposition introducing the characters and situation, but just when we have determined that The Real Thing will focus on the impact of

Charlotte's adultery, the scene shifts to a living-room where a new and as yet unidentified man is sorting through a pile of record albums. When Charlotte "enters barefoot, wearing HENRY's dressing gown" (p. 15), the audience immediately assumes that the man sifting through records is the lover with whom she betrayed Max. But their dialogue quickly establishes that Charlotte's new lover is in fact her old husband, a playwright who is busily selecting the eight records he "associate[s] with turning points" (p. 17) in his life for a radio program which will feature his life, work, and tastes in music and literature. He is having some difficulty, though, because he is, as Charlotte later explains, "a snob without being an inverted snob" (p. 24). That is, while Henry likes pop music, he is afraid to admit it because, as he explains, "I'm supposed to be one of your intellectual playwrights. I'm going to look like a prick, aren't I, announcing that while I was telling Jean-Paul Sartre and the post-war French existentialists where they had got it wrong, I was spending the whole time listening to the Crystals singing 'Da Doo Ron Ron'" (p. 17). In the midst of discovering that the tune for which he has been searching is the "Skater's Waltz,"--he rejects that song as "so banal" (p. 18)--Max enters, explaining, "Henry phoned . . ." (p. 19).

The ensuing dialogue establishes the stable frame for interpreting the remaining trysts, for though Stoppard will

work in segments of Strindberg's Miss Julie and Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, our expectations will never again be so thoroughly dislocated, for the realistic frame he provides for the characters hereafter remains consistent. Not only is Henry a playwright, but Max and Charlotte are both actors, and the opening scene, we learn, is taken from Henry's latest play, House of Cards, in which Max and Charlotte star--Charlotte most reluctantly. As Henry's wife she objects to the conclusion that the audience will inevitably reach: "All those people out front thinking, that's why she got the job" (p. 20). Then, introducing the theme of the real versus the illusory which will run throughout the play, she further objects to the audience's "thinking that I'm her . . . coming in with my little suitcase and duty-free bag--'It's me!--oooh, it's her!--so that's what they're like at home" (p. 20). She protests that Henry's play does not at all accurately represent their domestic situation: "You don't really think that if Henry caught me out with a lover, he'd sit around being witty about placemats. Like hell he would. He'd come apart like pick-a-sticks" (p. 22). That, she insists, is "the difference between plays and real life--thinking time" (p. 22).

Max tries to defuse Charlotte's attack on Henry by changing the subject to Annie, his wife: "Annie said she'd come round if her committee finished early. She's on this

Justice for Brodie Committee . . ." (p. 22). Thus, before the second scene is even half completed, Stoppard has introduced the second plot line--Annie's work on the Justice for Brodie Committee. Annie enters on cue with "a carrier bag loaded with greengrocery" (p. 23), and while Charlotte and Max are in the kitchen preparing vegetables and dip, we discover that Henry and Annie are having an affair, that Annie believes they should tell Charlotte and Max and end the charade. When Henry protests, Annie introduces the play's title by complaining, "You want to give it time--[. . .] time to go wrong, change, spoil. Then you'll know it wasn't the real thing" (p. 27). Before they can resolve this difference in opinion, Max bursts into the living-room, "bleeding from a cut finger" (p. 28). Henry offers him his handkerchief, setting up the object which Max will discover in Annie's car, leading him to conclude correctly, as Othello had concluded mistakenly, that his wife has betrayed him.

After Charlotte and Max reenter with the vegetables and dip, Charlotte rudely questions Annie about her childlessness and Henry retaliates against her bad behavior by bringing up the one topic she has begged him not to mention: "I say, Annie, what's this Brodie Committee all about. Charlotte was asking" (p. 31). Henry's plan backfires, though, for as Annie reluctantly retells the story of how she met Brodie on a train while travelling to an

anti-missiles demonstration and persuaded him to join the march--during which he ignited the wreath to the Unknown Soldier--Henry's objections to such activism become the target of an increasingly bitter attack. Max intones, "The guts of it, the sheer moral courage. An ordinary soldier using his weekend pass to demonstrate against their bloody missiles" (p. 32). But Henry, perhaps more aware than Max of the British role in developing the atomic bomb and of NATO commitments, protests with the question, "Their? I thought they were ours" (p. 32). When Max clarifies his point, "No, they're American" (p. 32), Henry sarcastically agrees, "Oh, yes--their . . ." (p. 32). Henry likewise questions Max's defense of Brodie, "He's a child" (p. 32), by asking, "He kicked two policemen inside out, didn't he?" (p. 33). Then Charlotte reveals that "when Henry comes across phrases like 'the caring society' he scrunches up the Guardian and draws his knees up into his chest" (p. 33). Henry defends himself by asserting that "Public postures have the configuration of private derangement" (p. 33) and suggests that members of the Justice for Brodie Committee are motivated not by altruism, but by "the desire to be taken for properly motivated members of the caring society" (p. 33). Then, when Henry labels Brodie "an out-and-out thug, an arsonist, vandalizer of a national shrine" (p. 34), Max protests that Brodie "got hammered by an emotional backlash" (p. 34). Henry's rebuttal, "No, no, you can't--

[. . .] I mean 'hammer' and 'backlash'" (p. 34) turns the already heated discussion into a stormy verbal battle. Max "puts down his glass definitively and stands up" (p. 34), delivering his parting shots at Henry: "You may have all the answers, but having all the answers is not what life's about [. . .] Brodie may not be an intellectual, like you, but he did march for a cause" (p. 34). Annie, who cares about people like Brodie, is, Max insists, "worth ten of you" (p. 35).

This effective rebuttal of Henry's apparent political apathy is, however, immediately undermined as Henry and Annie take advantage of Charlotte's escorting Max to the door to arrange a tryst for the afternoon. When Annie suggests meeting Henry at three, Henry asks, "What about Brodie?" (p. 35). Annie's reply--"Let him rot" (p. 35)--foreshadows the final scene's resolution of the Brodie problem, for already her words suggest that Annie is not nearly as altruistic and public-minded as Max would like to think. When public altruism conflicts with private desires, Annie chooses private desires.

Scene Three opens in a living-room whose "disposition of furniture makes the scene immediately reminiscent of the beginning of Scene I" (p. 35). In place of Charlotte's breezy entry, it is Annie who now enters to greet Max. She wants very much to listen to the radio program about Henry, but Max wants to talk. In the first scene, Max asked

Charlotte, "How's Ba'l" (p. 10), referring to Basel in Switzerland, the country Charlotte had purportedly visited on her business trip. Now, Max asks Annie, "How's Julie?" (p. 36), referring to Strindberg's Miss Julie, the play Annie has purportedly been rehearsing. When Annie asks for clarification as Charlotte had when Max brought up the topic of her Swiss sale, Max replies, "Julie. Miss Julie. Strindberg's Miss Julie. Miss Julie by August Strindberg, how is she?" (p. 36). His words, of course, draw their rhythms from the parallel speech Henry had written for him in Scene One: "Good sale. Was the sale good? The sale in Geneva, how was it?" (p. 12). The problem in the first scene was Charlotte's passport, which Max had discovered in her recipe box. The parallel object here is "Henry's handkerchief" (p. 36), now "soiled and blood-stained" (p. 36). Annie at first tries to dismiss the whole thing--"Well, give it back to him" (p. 36)--but Max's syntax and calm "theatrical" style from Scene One collapse as he sputters, "I did give it back to him. When was he in the car?" (p. 36). After a pause, he resumes, "It was a clean handkerchief, apart from my blood. Have you got a cold? It looks filthy. It's dried filthy. You're filthy" (p. 36). When Annie confesses, Max tries to believe "It didn't mean anything," (p. 37), but Annie tells him, "I'm awfully sorry, Max, but I love him" (p. 37).

Thus, this scene coyly toes the line between the real and the illusory, for Stoppard suggests simultaneously that it is "the real thing" and that it is not. On one hand, Max's inelegant sputtering supports Charlotte's contention that "that's the difference between plays and real life-- thinking time" (p. 22), time to compose an elegant response to the discovery of adultery. Furthermore, the scene is given the air of "realism" because both characters are firmly grounded in the stable outside frame of the play. But on the other hand, the cunning parallels between this scene and the first suggest that Charlotte's distinction between real life and plays may not be so great after all. The "real" Max borrows the pattern of the "artificial" Max's speech, and the handkerchief not only parallels the passport from Scene One, but it inevitably recalls that most famous of handkerchiefs from Othello. As he did in Rosencrantz, Stoppard works in this scene to blur the distinction between reality and illusion. If Stoppard does not now dislocate his audience's assumptions as thoroughly as he once did in Rosencrantz, it is mainly because The Real Thing, unlike Rosencrantz, establishes a solid context for interpreting the various versions of love and provides stable ground for the audience to stand on.

In spite of the multi-layered theatrical games within it, Scene Four, which depicts Henry and Annie in the living-room formerly occupied by Henry and Charlotte, remains

solidly grounded in the controlling "realistic" frame. Stoppard specifies that "the disposition of door and furniture makes the scene immediately reminiscent of Scene 2" (p. 37), but beyond the set and Annie's entrance, "barefoot and wearing HENRY's robe" (p. 38), Scene Four does not bear much resemblance to Scene Two. The scene opens with Henry suffering writer's block--"I can't write it. Let me off" (p. 38)--unable to compose the play about love that he promised Annie as a gift. After some talk about their sex life, Henry and Annie begin to read "without inflection" (p. 39) the script of Strindberg's Miss Julie to help Annie learn her lines. Stoppard selects a remarkably rich scene, for their reading of Strindberg's dialogue culminates in the question, "'Where did you learn to talk like that? Do you spend a lot of time in the theater?' (p. 40). The line reverberates beautifully, for it is not only borrowed from Strindberg's play about love for Stoppard's play about love, but it overtly suggests what Scene Three implied with Max's Miss Julie speech--itself borrowed from Henry's play. That is, the emotion we call love may depend as much on art as artistic representations of love depend on the "real life" emotion. As Roland Barthes argues, "Without the--always anterior--Book and Code, no desire, no jealousy: [. . .] Paolo and Francesca love each other according to the passion of Lancelot and Guinevere [. . .]: itself a lost origin, writing becomes the origin of emotion."⁴⁴ As

Stoppard's characters enter into the endless chain of links in the code of love, the distinction between the "real" love of Henry and Annie and the "artificial" love depicted in plays blurs. But this blurring of "real" love and "artificial" love undoubtedly falls short of Rosencrantz's elimination of the distinction between "real" and "artificial" death, mainly because we never doubt that Henry and Annie are "realistic" characters completely contained within the "realistic" mode. When other scripts intrude, they may add textual interest and stimulate thought, but they never disrupt or supercede the controlling frame.

Because we never really doubt the "realistic" terms of the depiction of Henry and Annie's love, we are not pushed by the structure of The Real Thing to question the ability of the theater to adequately represent love. We may contemplate the filtering of love through layers of art, but the play does not demand the sort of radical revision that Rosencrantz required, for in Rosencrantz there is no stable ground. One mode replaces another and then another, and no controlling frame provides a resting place. Perhaps because we do believe in the representation of Henry and Annie's love, Stoppard resorts to telling us that love cannot be represented, whereas in Rosencrantz he showed us that death cannot be represented. "I don't know how to write love" (p. 40), Henry, the playwright announces after the Strindberg reading. He continues,

I try to write it properly, and it just comes out embarrassing. It's either childish or it's rude. And the rude bits are absolutely juvenile. I can't use any of it. My credibility is already hanging by a thread after Desert Island Discs. Anyway, I'm too prudish. Perhaps I should write it completely artificial. Blank verse. Poetic imagery. (p. 40)

Then he declares love not so much unknowable, as was death in Rosencrantz, but simply "unliterary" (p. 40). "It's happiness expressed in banality and lust" (p. 40), he insists.

Annie's disappointment that Henry has not been able to write her play about love creates friction between the pair, and they argue first about jealousy--with Annie complaining that Henry never expresses jealousy--and then about Brodie--with Henry challenging Annie's use of the term "political prisoner" (p. 43) and punctuating the dialogue with sarcastic remarks about "Trotsky Playhouse" (p. 41). Henry, however, does not want to fight with Annie, especially since he must soon depart to pick up his teenaged daughter, Debbie, from the riding stables, and he delivers a conciliation speech which is interesting in itself but doubly so because it has evoked such polarized readings from Stoppard's critics. "I love love" (p. 44), he tells Annie.

I love having a lover and being one. The insularity of passion. I love it. I love the way it blurs the distinction between everyone who isn't one's lover. Only two kinds of presence in the world. There's you and there's them. (p. 44)

Corballis cites this passage as evidence of Henry's "emotional sterility" (p. 45) and rigid, "clockwork" "theories

about love"⁴⁵ and argues that "at the end of Scene IV we find him expatiating complacently on the insularity of passion."⁴⁶ Zeifman's reading, on the other hand, is more generous to both Henry and Stoppard. He describes the passage itself as "moving, sincere"⁴⁷ and furthermore, "seemingly no longer mediated by theatrical borrowing."⁴⁸

The reconciliation scene is, however, interrupted by "the alarm on HENRY's wristwatch" (p. 44), which goes off to signal that it is time to pick up Debbie. Corballis reads Henry's "digital-watch-complete-with-alarm"⁴⁹ as a metaphor for his "clockwork" state of mind, for digital watches were "the target of [. . .] ridicule in the featured scene from 'House of Cards,'"⁵⁰ Scene One of The Real Thing. Zeifman, though, reads the watch in the larger context of Stoppard's allusive play, arguing that "if theater keeps ambushing 'real life,' so 'real life' constantly evokes theater,"⁵¹ for after "Henry bravely risks his own 'voice' by declaring his love for Annie,"⁵² the alarm on the watch startles us, "breaking [the] tender love scene"⁵³ and reminding us "that what we have been watching is indeed a scene: a 'theatrical' moment deliberately created and then shattered."⁵⁴ He observes that "We have heard that sound before--specifically, in the opening moments of Genet's The Maids, where it similarly destroys the illusion of reality."⁵⁵ Zeifman's reading is not only more generous than Corballis's, but also more comprehensive and perceptive,

for in the London production I attended, Henry's speech was indeed every bit as moving and sincere as Zeifman describes it, not at all the sort of sterile and complacent passage Corballis suggests. Corballis's reading of Henry's love for Annie suffers in general from his attempt to reduce the complexity and allusiveness of the "love" plot to the simplicity and straightforwardness of the "political art" plot. While Zeifman can be faulted for ignoring the second plot almost completely, his reading of the "love" plot easily surpasses Corballis's.

When Act Two opens, Henry and Annie are two years older, and in spite of Annie's attempts to instill in Henry an appreciation of "good" music--classical music--Henry remains hopelessly attached to "Buddy Holly and Richie Valens" (p. 46). But while he may not have much of an ear for "good" music, his ear for "good" scripts remains, we learn, as finely tuned as ever. It transpires that Brodie has, at Annie's urging, written a television play explaining his "symbolic," hence "political," arson in the hope that bringing his imprisonment to the attention of the public will effect his release. Annie has asked Henry to read the play and give his opinion, which he is reluctant to do given the wretched state of the script. When pressed, though, Henry volunteers to read some of it aloud for Annie as well as for the audience. Brodie's script is, as Corballis argues, "gauche and unmarketable,"⁵⁶ consisting

of patently awful exchanges about British trains not running on time even though Britain is, Brodie contends, a fascist country like Mussolini's Italy. Henry is justly appalled by both the "extremely silly and bigoted" (p. 49) content and "the problem that [Brodie] can't write" (p. 49).

The debate which follows is reminiscent of the repeated debates within Travesties about the relative merits of craft and political motivation in producing art. Annie takes the position that the author and his motivations take precedence over writing ability. She rebuts Henry's accusation, "if it wasn't Brodie you'd never have got through it" (p. 49), by arguing, "But it is Brodie. That's the point" (p. 49). She further charges that Henry is "bigoted about what writing is supposed to be like" (p. 49). She continues with the rather credible argument that "You judge everything as though everyone starts off from the same place, aiming at the same prize. Eng. Lit. Shakespeare out in front by a mile, and the rest of the field trying to close the gap" (p. 49). Henry rejects her argument, though, by replying that "writing rotten plays is not in itself proof of rehabilitation. Still less of wrongful conviction" (p. 50), and that any sympathy the public might have felt for Brodie will vanish after "they've sat through his apologia" (p. 50) because "it's half as long as Das Kapital and only twice as funny" (p. 51).

Their debate, which is absolutely central to the "political art" plot, continues for several minutes of playing time, and as it approaches its culmination, it begins to bear an ever increasing resemblance to the substance, and finally the structure, of the confrontation between Tzara and Joyce in Travesties. When Annie charges that Henry is "jealous of the idea of the writer" (p. 51), that he wants "to keep it sacred, special, not something anybody can do" (p. 51), her argument recalls Tzara's position that "making poetry should be as natural as making water,"⁵⁷ for both would like to make authorship more "democratic," something anyone, no matter how untalented, can do. Annie asks Henry, "What's so good about putting words together?" (p. 51), unknowingly setting herself up for the play's most convincing rebuke, for like Joyce, Henry is a gifted reassembler of words. She is, however, allowed one last credible argument before her position is destroyed by her husband's unquestionably superior counter-argument. "You teach a lot of people what to expect from good writing" (p. 51), she begins, "and you end up with a lot of people saying you write well" (p. 51). Brodie, she continues, "really has something to say, something real" (p. 51), unlike Henry, who has "to think up something to write about just so [he] can keep writing" (p. 51).

Even Henry concedes that her argument is persuasive-- "Jesus, Annie, you're beginning to appal me. There's

something scary about stupidity made coherent" (p. 51)-- but he immediately asks for his cricket bat, which will serve a function akin to the scrap-filled hat Joyce conjured from while rebutting Dadaism. If anything, Henry's cricket bat is an even more effective visual metaphor than Joyce's hat, for it is free of any hint of the sham, the cheap trickery, that one inevitably associates with magicians' hats. "This thing here" (p. 52), he begins, "which looks like a wooden club, is actually several pieces of particular wood cunningly put together in a certain way so that the whole thing is sprung, like a dance floor" (p. 52). "If you get it right" (p. 52), he explains, "the cricket ball will travel two hundred yards in four seconds, and all you've done is give it a little knock" (p. 52). Plays are like cricket bats, Henry maintains. In a well-crafted play, ideas, when given "a little knock" (p. 52), will ". . . travel . . ." (p. 52). But Brodie's play is merely "a lump of wood of roughly the same shape trying to be a cricket bat, and if you hit a ball with it, the ball will travel about ten feet and you will drop the bat and dance about shouting 'Ouch!'" (p. 52). Well-crafted plays, like well-sprung cricket bats, are not "better because someone says [they are] better" (p. 52): they are simply better because they work. Like Joyce's speech on the Trojan War, Henry's cricket bat speech has the unmistakable ring of Truth.

And just as Joyce argues that the job of the artist is to gratify men's "urge for immortality,"⁵⁸ so Henry ultimately rests his case by citing the immortalizing function of art: "If you get the right [words] in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead" (p. 54). But Henry's position does not really need the reinforcement of Joyce's speech in Travesties but buttress its credibility, for in addition to the highly effective cricket bat metaphor and the dependable immortality argument, Henry offers a stunning rebuke to the content of Brodie's play which serves to erase any doubts about the Truth value of his stance. He charges that Brodie announces "every stale revelation of the newly enlightened" (p. 53) and proceeds with a short list: "war is profits, politicians are puppets, Parliament is a farce, justice is a fraud, property is theft . . . It's all here" (p. 53). He describes reading Brodie's play as an experience like that of "being run over very slowly by a travelling freak show of favourite simpletons" (p. 53). Annie, though not speechless as Tzara was after Joyce's rousing finale, can only respond by pulling Henry's latest script out of his typewriter and reading aloud the movie adventures of "Kronk and Zadok" (p. 55), two science fiction spaceship pilots. Henry interrupts her reading to rebut, "That's not words, that's pictures[. . . .] Anyway, alimony doesn't count" (p. 54). Before she leaves, though, Annie

reminds Henry, "You never wrote" (p. 55) my play, the one he promised her as a gift, the one about love. Though Henry concedes this point--"That's true, I didn't. I tried" (p. 55)--and in conceding lends credence to Annie's charge that he cannot write about important things, real things, his admission of failure does little to undermine the credibility of his larger defense of craft. In a certain sense, it even supports his argument that writers should privilege craft over content, for the one time he tried to start with content, with the topic of love, he failed. A critic willing to venture into the treacherous realm of autobiographical revelation might even suggest that Stoppard's own voice can be heard here, tentatively admitting the mistake of certain later plays, the mistake of trying to start with a topic, an issue, and in doing so, sometimes sacrificing the very elegance of craft that the real life playwright, no less than his character-playwright, values so highly.

The scene ends as Henry offers to follow Annie to Glasgow while she rehearses 'Tis Pity She's a Whore', but though she argues that she is going to stay in London to "get Brodie's play off the ground" (p. 55), the following scene opens with her "sitting by the window of a moving train" (p. 55) bound for Glasgow, proving that Henry has won on this issue as he so clearly won the argument about art. Billy, the actor who will play Giovanni opposite her

Annabella, enters the train compartment, and in a Scottish accent like Brodie's, first asks, "Is this seat taken?" (p. 55), and then comments, "You'd think with all these Fascists the trains would be on time" (p. 56). Billy is, of course, drawing his lines from Brodie's play, which he has also read. Annie is suitably startled by his line about Fascists--"Jesus, you gave me a shock" (p. 56)--but while we may join her in being temporarily dislocated by the intrusion of Brodie's script, the dialogue quickly ushers us back to the solid ground of the controlling, "realistic" frame. Zeifman argues that "this scene reverses the Pirandellian trick of the opening scene,"⁵⁹ for while we think we are watching a scene from a play--Brodie's play, from which Henry has just finished reading,⁶⁰ the scene is in fact "'really' happening."⁶¹ While Zeifman is accurate in noting the reversal, it is somewhat misleading to equate the thorough dislocation of Scene One with the relatively minor, short-lived dislocation in this train scene, for in a matter of only four lines of dialogue the confusion is sorted out as Brodie's play is unambiguously identified as a play within the larger, stable play. As Billy begins to flirt boldly with Annie, though, finally dropping into his lines from 'Tis Pity She's a Whore to express his attraction for Annie/Annabella, the scene subtly foreshadows the final scene's resolution of the nagging Brodie problem. Annie has tried throughout the play to maintain the impression

that Brodie's participation in the anti-missiles demonstration was motivated by the right reasons--public, altruistic reasons. But the private desires motivating Billy in this train scene--and Billy will act the part of Brodie when the arsonist's play is finally aired--are, we will learn in the play's closing moments, precisely the same kind of desires that had motivated Brodie to follow Annie to the march.

Stoppard separates the train scene, which ends with Billy courting Annie through the mediation of 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, from its parallel scene, in which Billy/Giovanni and Annie/Annabella will again exchange Ford's passionate dialogue, with a straightforward domestic scene. While Annie is away in Glasgow, Henry visits Charlotte's home to say good-bye to his daughter, Debbie, who is "going on the streets" (p. 61) in Henry's phrase, though she insists that she is merely going "on the road, not the streets" (p. 61). The scene is decisively grounded in the "realistic" mode, and while it is not a notably playful scene, it does serve several thematic ends. Henry's conversations with both Charlotte and his daughter firmly establish him as "the last romantic" (p. 65), not just in matters of love, but, as Henry reveals, in "work, music, literature, virginity, [and] loss of virginity" (p. 67) as well. Charlotte's warning, "You've still got one to lose, Henry" (p. 67), points to the metaphorical loss of virginity he will experience when Annie threatens his romantic ideals by having

an affair with Billy. Charlotte's search for the playbill listing the name of the actor who played Giovanni opposite her Annabella, and who also, not coincidentally, took her virginity, points just as clearly to Annie's upcoming affair.

And when the 'Tis Pity She's a Whore scene opens, it fulfills the expectations created in the "realistic" domestic scene, for Annie and Billy are indeed embarking on an affair. Zeifman argues that this scene from Ford raises the question, "who are we watching make love--Annabella and Giovanni, or Annie and Billy?"⁶² He maintains that "the 'artificial' and the 'real,' theatre and life, have begun to overlap and merge, to bleed into one another."⁶³ Though his reading of the love plot is on the whole perceptive, in this particular case his interpretation suffers, I think, from forcing the Rosencrantz model onto a scene which is not, in fact, dislocating and in the end does very little to blur the distinction between plays and real life. The Ford scene is, after all, perfectly plausible in the "realistic" terms of the controlling frame: Annie and Billy are both actors, and like Charlotte and the actor who once played Giovanni to her Annabella, they find the rehearsal situation an inviting opportunity to strike up an affair. Rather than breaking the outside context, then, the Ford scene meshes smoothly with the "realistic" frame of the play.

Likewise, the following scene, though repeating the pattern of discovered adultery from Scenes One and Three,

works more to reinforce the air of "realism" surrounding Henry and Annie's relationship than to call it into question. As in Scene Three, Annie enters breezily, drops off her coat, and again faces a barrage of questions, this time from Henry instead of Max. After discovering that Henry has rifled through her belongings just as Max had once rifled through Charlotte's in House of Cards, Annie tells Henry, "You should have put everything back. Everything would be the way it was" (p. 70), echoing Max's Scene One lines, "You should have just put [your passport] in your handbag. We'd still be an ideal couple" (p. 13). But aside from the patterning effect of these parallels, the scene proceeds in a very "realistic" fashion, for just as Charlotte had predicted in Scene Two, Henry does not in "real life" respond to the discovery of adultery with elegant speeches about Rembrandt placemats. As Henry's normally polished syntax shows signs of strain, the scene increasingly supports rather than undermines the distinction Charlotte made between "plays and real life" (p. 22). Henry's desperate questioning of Annie stands in sharp contrast to Max's composed, even flippant speeches in Henry's play, encouraging the perception that Henry's relationship with Annie, unlike the relationship depicted in House of Cards, is in fact "the real thing."

After a very brief scene depicting the filming of Brodie's play, during which we learn that Henry has

apparently given in to Annie's demands and rewritten the piece, the play shifts back to Annie and Henry for another highly "realistic" domestic scene. The expectation created by the play's opening--that we would witness a "realistic" portrayal of the impact of adultery on marriage--is finally fulfilled in The Real Thing's penultimate scene, for we do indeed get a glimpse of Henry's attempt to behave well while Annie carries on her affair with Billy. Billy and Brodie are, as Corballis observes, "almost composite personalities,"⁶⁴ and the evidence that Annie is tiring of her affair with Billy points toward the play's conclusion, when Annie will reject Brodie outright, and, in rejecting him, presumably remove Billy from her life as well. Perhaps the most interesting passage in this scene--which by itself probably deserves the "rather dull"⁶⁵ evaluation Corballis gives to the play as a whole--is Henry's explanation of why he rewrote Brodie's play. He tells Annie, "I write in order to be worth your while[. . . .] Without you I wouldn't care" (p. 77). But because he loves Annie, he explains, "I change my socks, and make money, and tart up Brodie's unspeakable drivel so he can be an author too, like me" (p. 77). He notes, however, that his rewrite does not seem "to have done him much good" (p. 77) and suggests that maybe "the authorities saw that it was a touch meretricious" (p. 77). Then, recalling Debbie's mention of "meretrix, a harlot" (p. 62), he contemplates aloud the

Latin root of the term "meretricious"--"Meretrix, meretricis. Harlot" (p. 77). His suggestion that he has prostituted himself by rewriting "Brodie's unspeakable drivel" (p. 77) might tempt a critic given to drawing autobiographical connections to suggest that, as in the cricket bat scene, Stoppard's own voice can be heard speaking through Henry, expressing some regret, however tentative, that he ever compromised his position that craft must take precedence over "the desire to be taken for [a] properly motivated" (p. 33) member "of the caring society" (p. 33).

The final scene emphatically reinforces the impression that Henry has prostituted himself, for when the controversial Brodie--alternatively a "political prisoner" (p. 42) or "an out-and-out thug" (p. 34)--finally makes an appearance, he conforms completely to Henry's "thug" description. Lenin may have received a severe thrashing in Travesties' second half, but the portrayal of Lenin looks almost subtle in comparison to this devastating denunciation of Brodie. After watching a videotape of Henry's revised version of his play, Brodie admires Henry's video machine and notes, "I'll have to nick one sometime" (p. 80). But Brodie is not just a thief, he is also disgustingly sexist, as his increasingly lewd comments about Annie reveal, and a bigot as well, as his slur against homosexuals indicates. Stoppard adds to these character flaws arrogance--Brodie maintains that his play was better before Henry "wrote it

clever" (p. 81)--and ingratitude, for he informs Henry, "I don't owe you" (p. 81), because, as he sees it, the rewrite did nothing to secure his release: "I'm out because the missiles I was marching against are using up the money they need for a prison to put me in" (p. 81). Finally, Brodie's revolting behavior prompts Annie to reveal that when she met him on the train, "he didn't know anything about a march" (p. 82), that he was merely impressed to meet the actress who had starred in his favorite childhood television series. "By the time we got to Liverpool Street he would have followed me into the Ku Klux Klan" (p. 82), she admits.

Annie only reveals the obvious about Brodie, who has by this time been reduced to a mere caricature, a one-dimensional, black-hatted villain. But her explanation for standing by him for so long, "What else could I do? He was my recruit" (p. 82), not only reveals the truth about herself, but also serves to complete the vindication of Henry, who, we recall, had wisely argued in Scene Two that "Public postures have the configuration of private derangement" (p. 33). Annie's pose of public altruism is shattered, for, as Corballis argues, the scene confirms "that her loyalty was a matter not of abstract principle but of personal guilt."⁶⁶ She signals the end of her loyalty to this unqualified thug as she "picks up [a] bowl of dip and smashes it into his face" (p. 82).

If there has been all too little subtlety in both the characterization of Brodie and the conclusion of Annie's attachment to him, at least Brodie's parting shot at Henry restores some degree of depth to this rather bombastic scene. In mock sympathy, he confides to Henry, "I don't really blame you. The price was right" (p. 82), using the same terms of prostitution to describe the revision that Henry himself had earlier used. As he recalls Annie's visit while he was in prison, Brodie indicates that he fully understands why Henry sold himself to gain Annie's favors: "There was a thrill coming off her like she was back on the box, but there was no way in[. . .] You know what I mean" (p. 83). With that, Brodie makes his exit, neatly solving the Brodie problem and, we must assume, the Billy problem as well.

While The Real Thing, like Travesties, banishes the villain who threatens art before moving into its happy ending--not only do Henry and Annie embrace in reconciliation, but Max, who last appeared in Scene Three, calls to say he is engaged to be married--the structural similarity between the two plays' resolutions is overshadowed by the vast stylistic differences between them. In Travesties, Stoppard had revived the playful, derivative style for one last dance before the final curtain, but the conclusion of The Real Thing remains firmly and unambiguously grounded in the straightforward "realistic" mode which has, except perhaps

for the brief Miss Julie reading in Scene Four, increasingly dominated the play since the close of the dislocating opening scene. If the conclusion of The Real Thing bears little stylistic resemblance to the resolution of Travesties, it bears still less to the uncertain, thoroughly dislocating play of styles which ushers in Rosencrantz's last curtain. The stylistic differences between The Real Thing and Rosencrantz profoundly affect the substance of the two plays as well, for while Rosencrantz's final dance of styles refused closure, creating doubts about the theater's ability to bring us the "reality" of death, The Real Thing's unambiguous "realism" creates just the opposite effect. In spite of Henry's speech announcing "I don't know how to write love" (p. 40), Stoppard's latest play leaves us firmly convinced that love can be adequately represented on the stage, that the "realistic" mode is up to the task of bringing us the Truth about love, certainly, but about the incompatibility of art and politics also. While Stoppard's Rosencrantz-style games in Act One may be "as pleasing as ever,"⁶⁷ I fear that Corballis is correct to conclude that they are simply "tinsel on the surface of a play that plods its way"⁶⁸ toward a clear-cut, "realistic" resolution.

If The Real Thing seems to plod rather than to dance, perhaps it is because we judge it in relation to the early, sparkling Stoppard style instead of simply comparing it to other "realistic" plays. As a "realistic" play, it is at

least moderately successful, for Henry and Annie's love is, on the whole, quite convincing, and though the caricatured Brodie threatens the credibility of the "political art" plot, this second strand clearly survives the threat, and Henry's cricket bat speech retains its aura of Truth. But Stoppard's own construction of the play invites critics to measure The Real Thing against Rosencrantz, his most dazzling achievement, for he attempts to revive for his treatment of love the strategy that had served him so well before as he explored the limits of the theater's ability to bring us the "reality" of death. And compared to Rosencrantz's sustained challenge to the Truth of competing modes of representation, The Real Thing's sporadic stylistic games seem rather unimpressive, to say the least.

Because it provides such conflicting evidence, The Real Thing offers at best only a cloudy indication of Stoppard's future work. While we might be tempted to read both the revival of the dislocating stylistic games and Henry's convincing condemnation of "political art" as signs that Stoppard, after a bout with activism, will return to the apparently apolitical, playful style of early works, we must pause to note that The Real Thing's stylistic games are mere window dressing on an otherwise "realistic" play, and further, that Henry's condemnation of "committed" but poorly crafted art remains firmly in the Truth-centered, message-oriented mode of Stoppard's own later, "committed"

plays. Henry's qualms about "politically committed" plays may be evidence of Stoppard's own reservations, but such connections are always suspect, especially with a playwright who has previously proven as slippery as Stoppard, and the unambiguous "realism" he adopts to present these qualms weighs heavily against the conclusion that Stoppard, like his character-playwright, will never compromise himself again by writing "committed" plays.

As much as those critics who prefer "the early stuff" might wish it otherwise, The Real Thing must finally be seen not so much as a tentative but promising return to the delightful, playful tradition of the early plays, but as another example of the message-oriented style which characterizes his later work. This strikes me as most regrettable, for Stoppard's early plays, especially Rosencrantz, are not only more theatrically effective than the "rather dull," "realistic," later plays, but potentially more politically effective as well. By firmly avoiding overt political content in Rosencrantz, Stoppard created room to play with the larger concepts of Truth, "realism," and "originality," key concepts which (to borrow a phrase from the playwright himself) form "the moral matrix, the moral sensibility, from which we make our judgments about the world."⁶⁹ As he playfully challenged Truth and "realism" in Rosencrantz, Stoppard gently nudged us toward a revision of the notions that authors write to bring us

the Truth, that art exists merely to mirror life. The blending and clashing of openly borrowed theatrical styles not only caused us to question the ability of any single mode of representation to bring us the Truth about "reality," but it also implicitly challenged the model of originality in authorship, for Rosencrantz is an undisguised "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."⁷⁰ Rosencrantz's implicit challenge to originality becomes explicit in the first half of Travesties as Stoppard not only borrows boldly and pervasively again, but depicts his Author-Fathers assembling master narratives from borrowed scraps as well.

In issuing a sustained challenge to the traditional concept of authorship, Stoppard worked in Rosencrantz and the first half of Travesties to topple a model whose political affiliations are profoundly conservative. Drawing its structure from both the biblical tale of the creation and the model of masculine reproduction, the traditional view of the author reinforces a theocentric, exclusively masculine world view. But by refusing the white robe and beard of the God-like Author, Stoppard strived in early plays to make room for texts which clearly have no single, legitimate Father, which do not seek to provide the One legitimate theoretical discourse. Unfortunately, in response to repeated misreadings of his refusal of mastery as aimless frivolity and reprehensible "parasitism,"

Stoppard has more recently abandoned his structural challenges to this decidedly unprogressive model to pursue a more limited, thematic exposé of the folly of "political art." While these later plays may be easily accessible-- precisely because they conform to traditional ideas about how authors should write and how theater should function-- they do not even approach the genuinely dislocating, profoundly political achievement of the structurally playful, boldly derivative, and delightfully uncertain early plays.

Notes

¹Tom Stoppard, The Real Thing (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1983), p. 62.

²Michael Hinden, "Jumpers: Stoppard and the Theater of Exhaustion," Twentieth Century Literature 27 (Spring 1981): 1-15.

³John M. Perlette, "Theatre at the Limit: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," forthcoming in Modern Drama.

⁴Carol Billman, "The Art of History in Tom Stoppard's Travesties," Kansas Quarterly 12 (Fall 1980): 52.

⁵Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 63.

⁶Hersh Ziefman, "Comedy of Ambush: Tom Stoppard's The Real Thing," Modern Drama 26 (June 1983): 140.

⁷Zeifman, p. 140.

⁸Richard Corballis, Stoppard: The Mystery and the Clockwork (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 139.

⁹Corballis, p. 148.

¹⁰Zeifman, p. 140.

¹¹Zeifman, p. 140.

- ¹²Zeifman, p. 140.
- ¹³Zeifman, p. 140.
- ¹⁴Zeifman, p. 140.
- ¹⁵Zeifman, p. 141.
- ¹⁶Zeifman, p. 141.
- ¹⁷Zeifman, p. 141.
- ¹⁸Zeifman, p. 141.
- ¹⁹Zeifman, p. 141.
- ²⁰Zeifman, p. 141.
- ²¹Zeifman, p. 143.
- ²²Corballis, p. 138.
- ²³Corballis, p. 138.
- ²⁴Corballis, p. 138.
- ²⁵Corballis, p. 138.
- ²⁶Corballis, p. 139.
- ²⁷Corballis, p. 139.
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- ³³Corballis, p. 139.
- ³⁴Corballis, p. 139.
- ³⁵Corballis, p. 146,
- ³⁶Corballis, p. 143.
- ³⁷Corballis, p. 146.

- ³⁸Corballis, p. 146.
- ³⁹Corballis, p. 148.
- ⁴⁰Corballis, p. 148.
- ⁴¹Corballis, p. 147.
- ⁴²Corballis, p. 148.
- ⁴³Corballis, p. 148.
- ⁴⁴Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 73-74.
- ⁴⁵Corballis, p. 143.
- ⁴⁶Corballis, p. 143.
- ⁴⁷Zeifman, p. 145.
- ⁴⁸Zeifman, p. 145.
- ⁴⁹Corballis, p. 143.
- ⁵⁰Corballis, p. 143.
- ⁵¹Zeifman, p. 145.
- ⁵²Zeifman, p. 145.
- ⁵³Zeifman, p. 146.
- ⁵⁴Zeifman, p. 146.
- ⁵⁵Zeifman, p. 146.
- ⁵⁶Corballis, p. 140.
- ⁵⁷Tom Stoppard, Travesties (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 62.
- ⁵⁸Stoppard, Travesties, p. 62.
- ⁵⁹Zeifman, p. 143.
- ⁶⁰Zeifman, p. 142.
- ⁶¹Zeifman, p. 142.
- ⁶²Zeifman, p. 145.

⁶³Zeifman, p. 145.

⁶⁴Corballis, p. 145.

⁶⁵Corballis, p. 148.

⁶⁶Corballis, p. 140.

⁶⁷Corballis, p. 147.

⁶⁸Corballis, p. 147.

⁶⁹Tom Stoppard, "Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas," Theatre Quarterly 4 (May-July 1974): 14.

⁷⁰Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 146.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

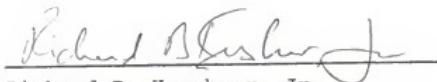
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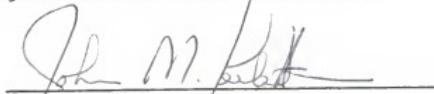
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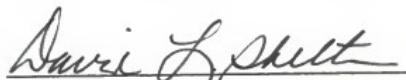
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December, 1985

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